







# R U N N E M E D E.

An Ancient Legend.

IN THREE VOLUMES.



BY LOUISA SIDNEY STANHOPE,

AUTHOR OF

THE BANDIT'S BRIDE THE CRUSADERS, THE SIEGE OF KENILWORTH,  
FESTIVAL OF MORA, AGE WE LIVE IN, &c. &c.

Where are the chiefs of the times of old? They have set like stars that have shone.  
We only hear the sound of their praise. They were renowned in their years:  
the terror of other times OSSIAN.

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VOL. I.



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## PREFACE.



THE majority of those friends who have perused RUNNEMEDE in manuscript, agree in the propriety of a preface; and, as in the council-house, most votes carry the day, so a preface is decided on, and so a preface must be written: but like unto ashes 'neath which the fire is unextinguished, a preface, to a work like Runnemedé, requires a slight and an almost fairy touch; for prematurely to unriddle a riddle, is but digging a deep pit, and burying alike the body and the spirit of interest. I will not say then, that in

the ruins of an abbey, or in an old and tumble-down relic of feudal times, surrounded by cloisters, or half sheltered by dilapidated towers, amid the roar of thunder, the play of lightning, the pattering of rain, the hooting of owls, and the thousand, thousand etcæteras, comprising the olio—I have lighted on worm-eaten parchments, and wasted the midnight oil, in deciphering broken and disjointed characters! No; I will simply say, that my researches, leading me to an old book-shop in Holborn, I culled, amid the lore of heterogeneous matter, Ware's Annals of Ireland. And those who have perused Ware's Annals of Ireland, know;—and those who have not perused Ware's Annals of Ireland, by simply opening the page, at and from the Anno Domini 1210, may soon know,

know, that the romantic vicissitudes of the noble house of Meath, furnish the corner-stone to the foregoing legend. Fancy, of course, boasts many ramifications of her own: for although in many respects, the disastrous reign of king John teems with tragic story; and although the great actions of great men might furnish ample specimens of prowess and patriotism; and few—and I speak it with the kindling glow of exultation—furnish so many specimens of prowess and patriotism, as the annals of our own seagirt island! still, like unto an epicurean feast, where many innovations from the substantial sirloin must pamper the vitiated palate, many novelties are alike requisite to pamper the insatiate palate of romance-readers; else

would the page be cast aside, and the poor author stigmatized with dulness and insipidity. Necessity then impels to the *ad libitum* of authorship: and though I have awakened characters, who have strutted their little hour, and returned—as we shall return—to original nothingness; though, with the promethean flame, I have roused them from their deep sleep, and brought them back into all the play and all the bustle of busy life; needing many agents, and many fervid touches of poetic imagery, like Shakespeare's Prospero, I have conjured

“Spirits from the vasty deep,”

to dapple with bright and gay flowers,  
the mead I have chosen to tread. Per-  
haps

haps there is no epoch in English history—no spot on English ground to which Englishmen can look back with so much pride and with so much gratitude as RUNNEMEDE! the grave of despotism and arbitrary power! the birth-place of Magna Charta! that precious bond of our indemnity; that palladium of our laws, and our glorious constitution! Be Runnemedede then *my indemnity* for favour; the breast-work, behind which I cower, from the assailant's stroke! Be Runnemedede, or rather, be the vital benefice derived at Runnemedede, the mediating medium wherewith to blunt the critic's gall-steeped arrow, and change his frown to sunshine!—for mine, be the professed labour of love, the simple unobtrusive aim, to divert the listlessness of a dull and idle hour;

and if that aim be accomplished, my labour is not vain.

*Upper Edmonton,*

*1st December 1824.*

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# RUNNEMEDE.

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## CHAPTER I.

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"A man of woe and mystery :  
Close wrapp'd in gloom, and sated with sad fancies."

"**S**HALL I sing to you, my dear father?" asked the youthful Matilda, her arm linked in his, her eyes fixed on his; clinging to him, as the tender ivy clingeth to the parent stem. "Say, dear, dearest father, what shall I do—what can I do, to win one smile?"

"Not to-night, my child: no song, no smile, to-night. I would fain be alone, my Matilda; even your voice disturbs me."



“Then will I creep like the blind mole ;” and Matilda moved with so light a step, that as gossamer she seemed to float on the ether. But though she spoke not, though she laboured to suppress her very breathing, often did she peep through the glossy clusters of her raven hair ; for she traced in the care-fraught features of her father more than their ordinary gloom ; she saw him half bending beneath his load of inward woe, his lips compressed, his cheeks of a paler hue, his brow, lowering and fitful, like the moon in the fair vault of heaven, buffeting the vagrant winds. Alas ! his was the tempest of remembrance ; and often would it gather in such fearful gusts, that the tender timid Matilda would tremble for his sanity, would wonder at the trials, which had divorced, one so good, and one so pious, from all commune with his fellow-men : but her terror and her wonder would ever cease in prayer ; for night and morning would  
she

she supplicate grace on griefs she had yet to learn.

Their little dwelling, reared on the green banks of the Gartampe, environed by vines, and woods, and pastures, and crouching almost within the conventual shadow of the white monks of Cisteaux, was lonely to isolation: yet was it the spot impressed on memory; the first, and the last, and the sole impression, expanding intellect could trace;—for she had passed her short life upon its borders, like some fair flower, budding, and blossoming, and shedding all its tints, and all its fragrance, unprized and unseen! Her father, known by the name of Walter, daily toiled in the garden of the convent of St. Mary; and sweet had been the bread gained by the sweat of his brow, had it been seasoned with content: but there was a thorn, a gangrene, festering beneath the surface. Sometimes he would preach upon endurance, upon philosophy, upon the pigmy span  
B 5
of

of the longest life, as though he himself had forgotten how to feel ; then would a single word, a single look, dissolve him into weakness, and he would yield to such wild bursts of sensibility, that made e'en nature totter. Often, after sunset, for whole hours would he absent himself from his home and his comforts, wandering in the woods and the pastures, until night would mingle earth and sky ; then would he steal back, in joyless spiritless despondence ; and if reproved in the wakeful watchfulness of filial interest, he would snatch Matilda to his bosom, steep her fair face in tears, hold her with a clasp of frenzy, then push her from him, and bid her curse, in him, the downfall of her prospects. Such had been the storms and the trials chequering the bright and beamy summer of her youth ; planting cares, where nought save smiles should have harboured ; exciting thought, where thought should have scarce found birth.

“ My

“ My child,” said Walter, pausing on the bank of the river, and pointing to the flower-bespangled pathway, winding to the convent-gate, “ you must go alone to the chapel. Pray for me at vespers; and should the abbot question my absence, say to him——” He ceased, and raised his hand to his forehead; then turning, with something of impatience—  
 “ Say to him, Matilda, I want air—heaven’s whole expanse of air—for not all the waters of the Gartampe can cool the scorching fever in my brain.”

“ Alas! what means my father?”

“ Do not fear me, girl: duty chains me to earth—religion chains me to earth—you chain me to earth! Though scorched and burning with ten thousand fires, I will not seek ice in death. Leave me without dread. By the immortal shades of my mighty forefathers, I would not take the coward leap of self-murder, though my years were to outnumber Methuselah’s, and every single year to

teem with the curses of the righteous Job. Leave me in confidence, dearest: however we may eat the hard crust of labour, the unknown gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, may yet wield thunder; may yet transform the spade into the——”

“What—what, my father?” and Matilda, snatching at his arm, gazed on him with such an eye of flame, with such speaking beaming features of intelligence, that it called him back to caution and to policy.

“Dear child,” he faltered, “you think too deeply;” and then he turned aside his face, to brush away the starting tear.

“Not so, my father,” clinging eagerly to him. “I am young in years, but not young in feeling; not young in exertion; not young in capability: trust me—try me, dear father. There is that within”—and she placed her spread hand upon her heart, and she raised her beautiful eyes to heaven—“which war-  
rants

rants more, far more, than I can utter. Ay, prove me, dear father, to the risk of peace, to the peril of life, and see if I lack fortitude."

"What would you suspect, my Matilda?" regaining in an instant all his firmness. "What mine of strange conjecture has my fevered language sprung?"

Matilda cast herself on the green-sward before him; she folded her polished arms around his knees; she gazed wistfully, imploringly, in his face.— "This is no time for misconception," she exclaimed. "I see you the victim of inward grief, my father, and I would share, if not mitigate, that grief: I see you——"

"How guess you," interrupted Walter, "that I have not dragged the mighty ruin of peace upon my own head?—that I am not now paying the just tax of my own transgression?—that here"—and he fixed his eyes intently on

on her varying features—"in this bright season of joy, and thankfulness, and love, when every bush rings with melody, every shrub puts forth its blossom, every green tree, and every smiling field, teems rich promise to ungrateful man—I am not weakly, wickedly murmuring at the humbleness of my born lot?"

"Oh, no, no!" and her look was incredulity; "it is not the griping pressure of penury which could draw one sigh from your heart: not born—say not born, dear father—capriciously assigned, not born."

"You are wrong, child; quite wrong: it is my penury, and your known privation, which lies as a scorpion-brood in my breast."

"If born to penury, what know we of privation?" questioned Matilda; and her eye was so searching, that Walter shrunk from the glance. "Nay, I would learn still further," she pursued:  
"tell

“ tell me, dear father, what can the mind crave beyond what it has ever seen or ever known?”

“ You perplex, you torture me, Matilda. Know you not,” and he tried to smile, “ that discontent found entrance even in Paradise?—that man, craving after knowledge, dared the tax of his own fall? Go, my child, to chapel; and the homilies of our ghostly fathers will tell you, content is not of earth.”

But Matilda moved not from his side: again she passed her arm through his, and again she looked imploringly in his face.—“ I would venture one more question,” she said. “ If we were to quit our cottage, and fly this solitude, think you, we should find peace beyond?”

“ Belike death,” pronounced Walter. “ No, child, no; we must school our hearts to our destinies, else, may we mar, not mend them: what we are born to endure, we must buckle within our scant scrip.”

“ And



“ And why not cheerfully, why not submissively, bear the burden we cannot gainsay ?” eagerly resumed Matilda. “ My dear father, if I could see smiles on your brow, I would not exchange this solitude for all my dreams have ever pictured.”

Walter shuddered, and his countenance wore an aspect of touching sorrow. “ Poor child ! poor lost one !” he murmured : then recovering himself— “ ’Tis well ; you judge wisely, Matilda : this spot, this solitude, is all that human existence needeth : here we breathe the breath of heaven ; and pulse, and grapes, and sleep, furnish fresh strength for labour : and for a grave, alas !” and he folded his arms in deep despondence, “ the like narrow limit sufficeth the monarch as the beggar. ’Tis a lesson, a crying lesson, my child, to humble pride, to hawl the soaring mind down to its native level : for what have you— what have I, to do with pride—breath-  
ing

ing atoms, mere worms, grains of sand, in this vast universe? Pride, forsooth! we must crush it, girl; we must smother it in the birth: man has nought to do with pride: the richest potentate came naked into the world; and nakedness, and mere corruption, is all that he can bear from it. Ay, this is a blessed spot to purge the dross from the sterling gold: here we may search our own hearts; here we may con the lesson of self-knowledge; here we may task ourselves, and scourge ourselves, to the detriment of life. Stilpo, nor Antisthenes, nor Seneca, with all their love of cold philosophy, could have wooed a spot more fitting." Matilda trembled; she had often seen her father enigmatical and wild, but she had never seen him so strangely wild as in the present hour: his dark eyes seemed to flash fire, and his breast to heave with the struggle of his inward feelings. "I am not mad, not quite mad," he resumed, deciphering

deciphering her doubts and her terrors. "Here me, Matilda: this day is the anniversary of a fate-fraught epoch: from sunrise, until now, have I waned it in the garden of St. Mary's: in manual toil, in persevering drudgery, have I striven to blunt the barb of memory, to dissipate the horrors of the past, to rend away the keen, keen pang of recollection: but I cannot crush the hydra—I cannot reach the fabled Lethe of forgetfulness. Some men, from the cradle to the grave, tread in velvet pathways: mine, God wot! has been rugged and toilsome, veering amid such shoals, and precipices, and headlong steeps, that hell seems to yawn at the basement."

"Alas! my father!" and the pitying, weeping Matilda, crept closer to his side.

Walter, for many moments, gazed upon her in silent anguish, till passionately clasping her to his breast—"An angel weeps for me!" he articulated;

"an

“ an angel mourns my pangs, and shares my vicissitudes ! Matilda,” and he spoke in an inward shuddering tone, “ I am a lost man : branded like Cain, driven like Cain, from all the heart most covets, from home, from inheritance :—and you—you—child of an enskied mother, image of her I have loved and lost ! you——” He ceased, or rather, sobs and suffocating emotion checked utterance.

“ But not with crime—not branded with crime, my father”—and Matilda spoke in all the native energy of confidence and innocence.

The start, the agony of Walter, was almost death-fraught ; his cheeks, his lips, were tintless, and he shook, as though with mortal palsy.—“ With blood,” he whispered. “ Matilda,” and he stretched forth his spread palm, “ see you not the crimson die, now, even now, upon my hand ?” But Matilda could not see, Matilda could not speak : the words of  
her

her father, like the astounding bolt of heaven's thunder, crushed all of power, and she hung upon that out-stretched arm, motionless and wan. Vain and ineffectual were the tears and self-upbraidings of the wretched Walter; for not until he had laid her on the sward, and sprinkled her marbled face with the waters of the Gartampe, did she betray one token of lingering existence; then, it was a deep and broken moan which passed her lips; and when her eyes unclosed, they spoke the spiritless language of despair. "My child! my innocent, my blessed child!" he faltered, sinking on his knees, and bending over her in remorse and anguish.

"My father!" she softly whispered, and then she strove to rally back a smile, but the effort seemed as mockery to the sensitive feelings of Walter.

"Not a smile—I pray you, not a smile," he exclaimed. "I am humbled, fallen: do ought, save curse me; for then  
would

would the desolation of my fate be complete."

Matilda raised herself from the earth: hers was the strength of duty and of nature: she placed her hand upon the arm of her father, and she pointed to the cloudless heavens. — "May God," she pronounced, "who readeth the inmost thoughts, pour balm and consolation on your wounded spirit! My father, if you have indeed wrought this grievous trespass, 'tis the hand which has waged against the heart."

"Perhaps," said Walter, mournfully, "all the extenuation, which mortal injury, and mortal irritation can urge, was mine: but passion is a plea, serving but to aggravate the deformity of the human mind. I would that my arm had been the weaker of the two; then had his grave been my grave, my remorse his remorse!"

"You met in combat, in open honourable combat?" and Matilda questioned

tioned in such a tone of gladness, that it rallied even the conscience-stricken spirit of her father. He gazed at her in silence, and tears bedewed his eyes.—“Speak, my father, in mercy speak,” urged the agonized girl: “not an assassin—say, not an assassin,” and her very soul seemed to hang upon the answer.

Was it pride, or was it the bright scintillations of a warrior’s spirit, which spoke in the start of the mysterious Walter, which crimsoned his cheeks, and flashed like light o’er his features? Certain it was, his air, his form, his very look, towering into majesty, seemed to gainsay the humble gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux; for graciousness spoke in his bend, and conscious honour in the smile which relaxed his brow.—“We met, my child,” he replied, “where no mortal eye could behold our mortal arbitrament: in a dell, deep, and dark, and lonely; hemmed in with rocks and woods, and suited to violence and to murder.

murder. We met—not by chance: for sure it was the sport of some fell fiend, hostile to the honour of our house:—we met, and hell was in our hearts;—we fought, and my hand streamed in the lifeblood of my victim.—He fell—he died, Matilda! Oh, blessed Jesu! that hour of horror! I could not staunch the welling blood—I could not stay the flitting spirit—I saw him dead, dead at my feet, and all my rancour vanished—I listened for a sigh—I felt for a pulse: but no sigh, no pulse returned: my fortune, my heritage, would I have bartered for a sigh, for a pulse, for one faint token of existence: but it was clay, it was breathless, bloodless clay, which lay beside me. The night shades gathered, and terror grew in the gloom—I fled—I left my reeking sword a testament against me: the name carved upon the steel, the known feud, all conspired, all conjoined: the ban was pronounced:—and I am here, Matilda; here, my child, to weep,  
and



and to deprecate our fortune." He ceased; he watched in her varying features the fluctuations of her feelings; he read sorrow, but nought of reprehension; her eyes and her heart were full, but her mind was relieved of its weightiest load. —"Is there no justice among men, my father?" she asked; "no human tribunal, to adjudge betwixt premeditated and accidental trespass? Surely, where life is placed at mutual hazard, the charge of murder fails."

"Alas!" sighed Walter, "how little can the innocent and the guileless dive amid the intricate folds of human policy and party malice! List to me, dear one. The tyrant who holds the scales of justice owes me mortal enmity. I have drawn sword against his usurpation, and his hate pursues me to the death. Sad is it to blear the young and artless mind with the daily practices of crime and subtilty; but the world, my Matilda, teems with dire ensamples of hypocrisy and guilt,  
with

with beings, so very heinous, that nature shrinks at their monstrous deformity. You have heard of the magnanimous Richard! of the hero of England! of he, who in defence of the blessed cross, bore fire and sword to distant Asia! When king Richard paid the forfeit destined to all flesh, John, earl of Mortaigne, in defiance of law and justice, seized on the regal sceptre: his elder brother's son, the infant duke of Bretagne, lived; but right was as thistle-down in the scale. Gold, my child, is oft the touchstone to man's integrity: in humbler life, the claim of primogeniture makes fertile the schemes of knavish policy, sharpens the wit of sordid interest, and dissipates the seeming of nominal honesty: we read it—we see it—we *feel* it, in every-day life:—what then, when baited with the jewelled crown of majesty! This John, this calculating, cold blooded, deep usurper, gained possession, and the spirit of party quickened.

Arthur, the infant heir, in right of his father Geoffry, killed in a tournament at Paris, was yielded by his mother, Constance, to the care and guardianship of Philip, king of France; and the provinces of Touraine, Maine, and Anjou, acknowledging him their liege lord, openly and firmly disclaimed the treasons of his subtle uncle. This uncle—this anointed king—this vicegerent of God's justice upon earth—this permitted scourge—this open violator of nature's bounden duty—this royal murderer!—Your ear, my child; list to me, lest the winds of heaven catch the words I utter.—'This tyrant John—my enemy, and the enemy of the whole human race—this crowned king of England; this——"

"Your enemy, and of England, my father?" asked the wondering Matilda.

"Child," resumed Walter, after a pause of deep thought, "I come from a land, whose fields are as green, whose sons are as brave, whose daughters are as fair,

fair, as the fields, the sons, the daughters of France ! from a land, gemmed and girt in by the waves of ocean : but not from England, although England's reigning king drove me from my rightful heritage."

" Say *we* ; surely, *we*, my father ;" and then Matilda trembled at what she had uttered, for she saw his cheek fade to clay, his lip quiver, and sadness and grief pervade his features.

" True, my child, I may say *we* ; for my exile was shared and softened, by the fairest, the dearest, and the best of man's comforters ! It was woman, who smiled like a cherub in the storm ; woman, matchless woman, who stayed me from the desolating ravage of despair ! This solitude was no solitude, whilst your mother was spared to me : but when I lost your mother, all earth was solitude. Saints of heaven ! I loved her, dearer purer, than when I claimed her at the altar ; loved her, for her heroism, for her,

c 2

faith,

faith, and for her virtues! She abandoned rank and splendour, and all the glories of this world, for me: and when the winds howled loudest, and the tempest raged fiercest, she crept closer to my heart, and nestled in my arms for shelter! Ah! and she would call herself blessed, thrice blessed, if she could chase one tear, and lure back one smile; she ———”

“Of the royal child, my father?” interrupted Matilda, anxious to turn the current of his thoughts. “I beseech you, alone of prince Arthur?”

Walter stifled down a suffocating sob. —“True—true, I would sketch the picture of our arch foe; I would tell his crimes: but why not first of your blessed mother?”

“Perchance,” said Matilda, “it may rive anew the green wounds of the heart: dearest father, I would spare the detail of past sorrow.”

“My life has been a life of sorrow,”  
mournfully

mournfully rejoined Walter; "sorrow, not the less pungent, because of my own creation. Ah, my child! I have dashed gall in my own cup, and now I murmur at its bitterness. But you judge fitting: another time, another season, for private ill: now, of the tyrant John, and the murdered Arthur."

"Murdered!" echoed Matilda, and her heart grew sick within her.

"Short is the pass betwixt a monarch's prison and his grave," resumed Walter. "Arthur, in right of his father, was the lawful king of England; in right of his mother, the lawful duke of Britany: his uncle, the usurper of his birthright, his conqueror, and his captor, at the siege of Mirabel, removed him, under a strong escort, to Falaise; and from Falaise, because, spurning at policy, the noble boy cast into the teeth of the merciless John, his thefts and his treasons, he was quick removed to Rouen, and in the custody of Robert de Viepont, was close immured

within the new tower of the castle. Holy Jesu! that fatal castle! that fatal tower! it hung over the deep bed of the Seine! Can you not guess the dire catastrophe—the woful close of promise—the mildew scattered by policy and hate? Can you not guess?——”

“His uncle! his own uncle!” ejaculated the pitying horror-struck Matilda; “his own blood! his own father’s brother!”

“Alas! my child,” pursued the shuddering Walter, “it is not always that the tie of consanguinity strengthens the bond of amity: we read in our intercourse with men, that too often does it act as oil upon the fire of contention; for voracious avarice, gendering the seeds of hate and envy, the throws, and the chicanery, and the mad struggles of injustice, chokes up every lingering spring of heart and of nature. ‘The robber who filches gold——’”

“Of the prince? I pray you, of the hapless prince, my father? My whole heart

heart is now at Rouen, in the drear tower o'ertopping the Seine."

"Much mystery deepens the gloom of that tower," returned Walter: "the eye of man kens little; the eye of God is all-searching: the body of prince Arthur was found drowned in the river Seine; it was dragged up in a fisherman's net; it was recognized by many, and buried privately in the abbey-church of St. Mary des Prez. The partizans of king John attributed all to blind chance, spoke of accident in attempted escape; but the sword-wounds in the body of the ill-starred victim gave lie to the subtilty: his breast, his side, bore record to the damning deed of murder; and John, hated of all good men, and laden with the curse of a heart-rived mother, hastened back to England. The nobles of Britany mourned their leader, but the fall of their leader heaped fuel on the flames of party-hate: the duchess Constance, the mourning mother of prince Arthur,



bore her griefs and her wrongs to the foot of Philip's throne. John, as duke of Normandy, and homager to the sovereign of France, was summoned to appear before king Philip, and his assembled council of peers and nobles, to answer to the double charge of treason and murder ; but the heart, quailing in the consciousness of guilt, dared not the ordeal. John slunk from the trial ; and for the contempt in his non-appearance, he was declared a traitor to his liege lord, an enemy to the crown of France, and the murderer of his elder brother's son ; —and he was doomed to forfeit all the seigniories he held by homage, and which seigniories were to be re-entered by force of arms."

" And this man, this very man," exclaimed the wondering Matilda, " deals out justice, and distributes rewards and punishments."

" This very man," rejoined Walter, " cloaked in the ermine of majesty, wields

wields the sceptre of a whole kingdom ; this very man, drove me from the green isle of my birth, from home, from——  
Hark, my child ! I hear the sound of horsehoofs, and I see a moving train advancing quick upon us ; perchance some palmers, borne on pious mission to the abbey of St. Mary's. I must away : in the loneliness of the woods, I must erect my altar of worship. Go you to the chapel alone. Should you encounter these strangers, be secret, be wary : let not eye or tongue betray the trust imposed : life—life, my child, is in your keeping." Then wringing her hand in adieu—  
" Know me as the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux," he whispered ; and swift as fabled Fear, darted from her side, and crossing the sedgy path, disappeared in a thicket of alder and chesnut.

## CHAPTER II.

“ As fair and sweet,  
Blooms the lone lily on the mountain glade,  
As blooms the garden’s pride :  
Alike each petal drinks the balmy dew,  
And Nature’s glory shares.”

“ Ay, my father, silent as death,” mused Matilda, turning from the thicket, and speeding her course towards the convent chapel—“ not the rack shall extort thy secret;” and then she turned involuntarily, for she heard a voice staying her footsteps, and the succeeding instant, a troop, clad in dun-coloured vestments, halted at her side.—“ God’s grace betide thee, maiden ! we come, craving the prayers of the white monks of Cisteaux. Hie thee to the same altar ?”

Matilda

Matilda looked up, and the blush on her cheek deepened, for she met the piercing eyes of one of the stranger pilgrims rivetted upon her; and though his face was half hid by the slouch of his hat, and the majesty of his form, close muffled in his long serge cloak—still, that eye, that face, and that half-bending form, conveyed more than casual interest. He spoke not, but his gaze was intent; and when Matilda, timid and bashful, warned of the vesper hour, and pointed out the nearest track to the convent-gate, his bow was the bow of courtesy.

“God’s truth!” resumed the first speaker, “but thou art an angel-guide, sweet maid, and fitly fashioned to pilot into Paradise! I would rather follow in thy train, than convoy a thousand worthies!” and then he sprung from his horse, and moved at her side.

But the timid, the sensitive Matilda, beautiful in her blushes and her diffi-

dence, in the twinkling of an eye assumed all the repelling dignity of awakened pride; she surveyed him with a glance of stern reproof, as coldly she replied—"However our track wend to the same spot, I journey it alone;" and then she drew back, impatient of delay.

"Marvellously imperative!" muttered the stranger, yet he vaulted into his saddle, and hastened after his companions.

For a brief moment, Matilda paused, doubtful, whether to advance, and brave again the scrutiny of the palmers, or to retreat to the shelter of her own humble home: but reflection urged the duty of the calling: it was the errand of piety; it was the nightly offering of grateful praise; and she felt, that in adoration of the Creator, nought should stay the homage of the creature: she hastened onwards, and she took her accustomed station in the nave of the chapel. But though her own pious spirit

spirit shut from perception all of this world; though tranced in the devotion of her feelings, she knelt, with prayer in her heart, and prayer on her tongue, the symmetry of her form, the beauty of her features—scarce less perfect than the image of the Madona glowing at the high altar!—shone through her garb of lowliness, and added such force to her zeal, such splendour to her worship, that it stole many a thought from heaven, and rivetted many a glance, which had otherwise been directed upwards! She listened to the homily of the officiating priest, and she arose at the close of his nightly benediction, and she quitted the chapel, regardless of the strangers, and unconscious of the interest she elicited.

Flaky clouds of gold and purple still canopied the west; the air was soft and balmy, and nature, so hushed and still, that already did she seem as though wrapped in the fast-coming trance of repose,

pose. Fearless and eager, Matilda struck into the winding pathway : it was her father, drooping and sad, which beckoned onwards ; her father, racked by the fiends of remembrance, and clinging to her for consolation, through all the sorrows of his rayless fortune ; her father, tossed by the tempest of persecution, and living the banished victim of injustice and hate. Mournful were her musings, for again and again did she recall that dire night of conflict and death : she knew not the rank or the name of the fallen combatant ; but she felt assured that her father was the aggrieved one, and as such, her native charity, prayed for the unhouseled spirit, dismissed in all its toil of sin ; she prayed too for returning peace to the sick soul of her father ; she prayed, to see him submissive to his destiny, and patient under each accumulating ill. That he moved in a character foreign to his native calling was self-evident ; for ah ! how opposite, his language, his manners, to the language, the

the manners, of those born to labour ! his mind, so stored ; his sentiments, so enlarged ; his principles, so noble : steering her through all the elaborate branches of study, nor neglecting even the flowery paths of lighter culture ; for to him was she indebted for every advantage she possessed : the recreation of his leisure hours had been to direct the exuberant shoots of her youthful fancy, pruning, or encouraging, as accorded best with his own ideas of human excellence. —“ And can I see thee droop, my father,” she softly sighed—“ can I know thee born to sorrow, without sharing every pang of thy feeling heart ? Oh ! Virgin Mother ! lighten those pangs, and staunch every bleeding wound of his sick fancy !”

She paused to peer through a sudden opening in the high brushwood, eager to hail a footfall, to catch the distant outline of his well-known form ; but silence crowned the solitude : she had lost  
sight



sight of the convent, and the rapid advance of evening was fast involving earth and sky in one unvarying gloom. Long had the last gleam of glory died in the west; the moon, shrouded in clouds, was pursuing her silent course in the heavens, and the rippling waters of the Gartampe, bright in reflected radiance, wavy and undulating, like threads of liquid silver, contrasted the rich pastures.

“We shall meet anon, perchance in our own home,” thought Matilda, and then she hastened onwards, till a rustling among the trees warned of an approach. Again she paused; she listened; she held in her breath. Was it fancy? or was it a sigh, which gathered in the stillness? Fears, unfelt before, quickened the pulses at her heart, and the roses of her cheek faded.—“Is it you, my dear father?” she timidly asked, and then she started back, for her hand was forcibly taken, and she recognized

nized in the intruder, the stranger, who in her pass to the chapel, had so uncourteously forced himself upon her notice.

“ No, not your father, angelic girl ! but one, impelled by stronger than a father’s feelings. What if I swear to you, that the vision of a moment will abide with me to my death. Alack ! ” and he threw into his bold eye an expression which rallied back the truant crimson of modesty, “ the beauties of a court, are as stars in the sunshine, compared to thy all-perfect loveliness ! ”

“ I am a stranger to the language of a court,” said Matilda, firmly, “ but not to the usages of society. I pray you, let me pass : further parley is intrusive.”

“ No, by Heaven, fair one ! not for a sovereign’s ransom, would I forego this blessed chance. Thou hast shot like a beam of light athwart my senses ; thou hast put to flight all my devotion ; thou  
hast

hast lured me from the altar of my worship; and now fain would I reap some earnest of charity."

"Nought can you reap save disdain," and Matilda strove to look a confidence she could not feel.

"Peerless even in anger!" pursued her persecutor, emboldened by her terrors. "Strange freak of fortune, in this drear solitude, to plant a gem, worthy a regal throne!" and then again he snatched her hand, and eagerly perused her features.

She struggled for freedom; she tried to pass, but the stranger barred up the pathway: she was alone; she was at his mercy: night was speeding on rapid wing: to shriek for aid, was, perchance, to call ruin on the head of her father:—he might be recognized—he might be dragged from his sanctuary—yet to tarry, was to brave indignity and insult.—"God—God direct me!" she aspired, and then, with a sudden bound, she

she darted midst the bushes, and with the light footing of a sylph, fled back towards the convent.

The stranger caught at her cloak, and her cloak remained in his grasp; her bonnet too was rifled by the briars: and as some scared hind, eluding the hunter, she threaded the mazy pathway; her face, her bosom, white as moonshine; her raven hair, despoiled of every trammel, and floating, like darkening mists around a snow-capped mountain! She paused not for breath or thought: it was the dread of pursuit; it was the horror of detention, which adding wings to fear, hurried her even to the verge of rashness. The outline of a human form, pacing the terrace-walk which skirted the gardens of the convent, promised security from insult: it was protection she sought; it was terror of the being from whom she fled, which precipitated her, so wild and sudden, upon the moody trance of meditation—"Save me—save me, from yon bold man!" she implored; and the out-  
stretched

stretched arm, the iron nerve which sustained her, seemed an indemnity from every ill.

An accent, gentle and soothing ; a manner, bland and conciliating, tokened succour and support : she looked up, and she met the mild and beamy eye, so fashioned to assure and to interest : it was the stranger, whose courteous bow, and silent notice, had contrasted the intrusive homage of his companion. The moonbeams fell upon his high forehead ; and the perfect beauty of his features, saddened by thought and gloom, and tempered in the silver radiance, looked more like the Parian bust of art, than aught she had seen in breathing life.—“How fare you, lady ?” he questioned ; but Matilda clung, closer, tighter to his arm ; she fancied an advancing footstep, and she conjured the image of her pursuer.

“Oh, save me ! save me !” she again implored, and then she pointed to the path she had trodden, and trembled with wild terror.

“Ay, with my life,” exclaimed the stranger. “Take courage, fairest creature, you are safe as with the fathers of the church !”

“I believe so—I feel so,” faltered Matilda, yet still she hung panting on his arm.

“I see nought to intimidate,” pursued the stranger, striving to reassure ; “nought, save shadows, chequering the moonshine. Surely, lady, so fearful, and so gentle, ’tis an unseemly hour to wander forth from home.”

Matilda raised her full-orbed eyes to the face of the stranger ; she shook back the rich clusters of her beautiful hair, and her perfect features beamed intelligence and security.—“Nightly have I said my prayers in the convent chapel,” she artlessly replied ; “and till now, I felt the holy errand a safeguard from harm. God of mercy ! how could I picture sin in a palmer’s weeds !”

The stranger started, and a lowering  
cloud

cloud chased the placidity of his brow ; it was anger, it was indignation, which flashed, like lightning, o'er his countenance.—“ Is it man,” he pronounced, “ to scare, where nature prompts protection ?” Then rallying back a smile—“ You are a native of this solitude,” he pursued, “ and unacquainted with the loose unhallowed habits of the world.”

“ I live in this solitude,” rejoined Matilda ; “ and I bless Heaven, such is my destiny, if the world teems with many like samples.”

Had she touched the secret chord of feeling, and was he too a sample of the world's deformity ? She shrunk back, for she read rage and grief in his eye.—“ In the world,” he murmured, “ there is little sterling honour, little sterling faith : man preys upon his fellow, and might tramples upon right. But why scare your gentleness with the unseemly picture ? Suffer me,” recovering all his native softness, “ to tend you to your dwelling.

dwelling. Should we meet this recreant palmer, he will not harm you now"—and then he led forward, and they struck into the woody path she had quitted.

As they advanced upon the solitary home of the exiled Walter, new terrors crowded on the mind of Matilda; she thought of her father's sorrows, of her father's trials, and she dreaded, lest a chance encounter should expose him to danger: all of self vanished in the threatened peril; and she now desired the absence of her unknown protector, as ardently as she had before coveted his succour; she moved silently and thoughtfully at his side, unmindful of the curiosity and interest her beauty and her native grace excited, trembling at the fall of a leaf, and dreading, more than death, a discovery but barely possible. Ere yet they emerged from the close encustering shrubs, she paused abruptly.—  
“ I fear you will gift me with little grace  
for



for service," she said, "but here, kind sir, would I offer my gratitude and my thanks."

"What, and venture with no better staff than your own terrors? Not so, lady: the hawk may pounce upon the dove, within the circlet of her own bower."

"I am safe—quite, quite safe, here," eagerly resumed Matilda: "indeed, and in very truth, I would tax your courtesy no further."

"Your pardon, lady; I would but consign you to the shelter of kindred hands."

The fair cheek of Matilda outblushed the roses which clustered round her dwelling.—"I fear—I greatly fear," she faltered; then hesitated, and raising her sunny eyes to his face—"We live almost alone—almost in hermit solitude. Generous stranger, accept my thanks: my father would thank you also, but—but——" She ceased; she cast an eager glance

glance around, yet still the palmer tarried.

New thoughts, new doubts assailed him : could it be art ?—could it be wilful systematic deceit ? He saw her impatient almost to agony :—was it indeed a father's, or was it a lover's jealous eye she shunned ?—“ Lady,” he urged, “ I would but yield you to your father's keeping : yet a little further, and then farewell !”

Matilda could not speak ; her spirit drooped—her courage died within her ; yet when she reached the quickset hedge, skirting her humble home, her filial fears, her filial love, essayed another effort : she paused again, and timidly, wistfully, she raised her eyes of “ dewy light” to his. A thousand perils lurked in that melting eye ; it bore volumes from—it spoke volumes to the heart of sensibility ! The stranger had before seen beauty, had before bowed at the shrine of beauty ; but never had he seen beauty, so perfect,

so resistless, so soul-entrancing ! Divested of all external covering, her neck, her arms, white as the cygnet's down; her polished forehead, shadowed but by Nature's matchless contrast, her own dark and exuberant hair; her features, dappled with the varying hues of quick and sensitive feeling; now, all fear; anon, all tenderness; beaming as the fabled goddess of love, couched in innocence and maiden grace !

For a brief moment, the stranger stood absorbed and lost, half bending, half yielding to the trance of fascination; then recovering himself, and rallying from the trammel—"Lady," he said, "you are bowered in roses, yourself the loveliest rose!" and then he bowed gallantly, and he placed his hand upon the wicket.

"My father," and Matilda spoke in a voice low and tremulous, "has reared them for me : my father is the gardener  
of

of the white monks of Cisteaux ; he—  
he——”

“ The gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux !” echoed the stranger, and his accent and his countenance betrayed incredulity.

“ My father,” resumed Matilda, eager and anxious, “ craves no joy beyond his own home ; he lives here in peace ; he—  
he——Kind sir,” and she spoke with trepidation, “ my father is a man of many sorrows—my father likes not the converse of strangers.”

“ I understand you, lady. Sacred be your father’s sorrows ; sacred be your father’s dwelling ! Farewell !” and he took her passive hand and bowed upon it—“ Farewell, fairest of Heaven’s creatures ! Whatever be my destiny here below, the daughter of the unknown gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, will live as a sunbeam on my fancy !”

CHAPTER III.  
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“ ————Time, anon,  
Will chase the misty shroud of dark disguise ;  
And like day’s orb, baffling the hazy east,  
Bring light and brightness.”

It was midnight before Walter sought the shelter of his dwelling ; and when he did return, his step was so perturbed, his eye so haggard, and his cheek so wan, that Matilda, terrified and anxious, gazed, but could not question.—“ We must to rest, dear one,” he said : “ to-morrow, at day-dawn, my labour must extend beyond the garden of St. Mary.”

“ Beyond the garden of St. Mary,” repeated Matilda. “ Alack, my father ! what bodes this change ? ”

“ It bodes more than the eye kens,” rejoined Walter, aiming at cheerfulness.

“ To-morrow,

“ To-morrow, at the first crow of chanticleer, I must speed to Gueret.”

“ To Gueret, my dear father? Ah! surely you do but banter.”

“ No, on my soul, Matilda, I do not fable. I speak in sober earnestness. To-morrow, upon a mission of importance and hope, I journey to Gueret.”

“ And I, my father?”

“ Here must you tarry my return: then shall my mission be expounded. I go, dearest, warmed by God’s grace, and lightened by the first ray which has beamed on my self-banishment.”

“ To Gueret,” again exclaimed Matilda, yielding to her fast-crowding fears. “ Ah, my father! weigh you well the peril? If seen—if recognised—if—if —”

“ I move in a goodly train, my child. The pilgrims, who this even visited St. Mary’s cloister, bear me fellowship.”

“ The pilgrims,” repeated the wondering girl.

“ Ay, the pilgrims,” rejoined Walter: “ those whom you encountered in your pass to the chapel. Did you not mark a man, preeminently gifted, preeminently noble?”

“ Yes—yes, my father: one who surpasseth all I ever saw, I ever dreamt of grace and beauty !”

“ And your heart, Matilda: did not your heart own him?—did not your heart yearn to greet him?”

“ My heart, in his kindly presence, regained all its confidence,” replied Matilda.

“ Then you did note him—you did love him, by instinct and by nature !”

“ I noted him for his graciousness,” said Matilda, artlessly; “ and sure I owe him much for his service;” and then, with a heightened blush, and an averted eye, she narrated her own adventure: but she passed lightly over the interruption of the one palmer, and lingered  
upon

upon the grace, the gentleness, and the urbanity of the other.

“ Ah! the same! the same!” ejaculated Walter; “ such was ever the brave, the magnanimous Hugh! Took you him for your own father, my Matilda? Once, in form and feature, we were likened unto twins: and God wot, we have been twins in suffering, alike persecuted, alike aggrieved!” Matilda spoke not, but her look tokened doubt almost of his sanity. “ Poor Hugh!” pursued Walter, “ time has wrought strange changes; time has sprinkled thy brow with grey! But though thy youth and thy beauty, like unto a moth fretting her garment, has faded and fled; thy heart, thy spirit, and thy noble nature, will remain stanch unto death!”

“ Grey, my father! how grey?” asked the astonished girl. “ His brow was shadowed with the richest auburn; and his eyes, of purest blue, spoke thought, not age.”



"Sure your wits are distraught," quick rejoined Walter — "blue eyes! and auburn hair! Beshrew me, girl! the man I mean, save one, has numbered as many winters as have rolled over my own head: and the like blasts, and the like storms and perils, have planted snow, where once was locks, as dark and wavy as your own. This man——"

"Here is some strange misconception," interrupted Matilda. "My dear father, the noble stranger who tended me to the gate of our own dwelling, was in the full blow of his strength: not a furrow marked his brow, or sign of age matured the graces of his person."

Walter for many moments stood wrapt in profound thought.—"The slouched bonnet, and dun amice," he at length resumed, "close veils the native splendour of these noble pilgrims. They move in lowliness and humility; they ——"

"Not so," she exclaimed; "not the  
dun

dun cloak, or muffling cowl of monkhood, could subdue the native splendour of that gallant stranger. His words, his very looks, my father, proclaim him rich in all those graces which note the soul's nobility! He may impart splendour to the garb of lowliness; but such is his native splendour, that he could not owe one ray e'en to imperial people! He—he——" She paused and blushed, for she read surprise and doubtful inquiry in the eye which rested on her.

"You are a warm panegyrist," said Walter. "Methinks, Matilda, your colouring savours the romance of youth's first day-dream. Would you know this stranger in other than his borrowed guise?"

"Ay, midst a thousand," returned the artless girl: "his bow; his smile; his hair of gold; his eyes of heaven-like blue! yes, yes, my father, I should know him in distant Asia."

"Belike you noted him in the chapel."

Matilda looked reproach. — “How note aught of the creature in praying to the Creator. No, dear father, in the chapel, I noted nought, save the homily of father Olave.”

“Then must deceptive moonshine have given finish to your picture,” observed Walter: “perchance, in open day, the conjured burnish would fade to common currency. But no more of this young hero: I would claim your interest for one of an older stamp. School your heart for marvels, dear child, for we live in an age of marvel. Think not I dream, but God has visited me with grace. This day, this very anniversary of my own guilt and woe, I have seen—not a spirit, Matilda—but I have seen a brother, whom I have mourned for dead up to that selfsame hour; a brother, implicated in my fall, and driven like me, from home and from honours. I have seen him in life—I have held him to my breast—I have felt the throbbings of  
of

of his own warm heart! I am sane, quite sane, Matilda. The dew descends upon the tare as upon the wheat; the sun shines upon the hellebore as upon the palm-tree:—I have been as hellebore to my whole race, yet does the Almighty God withhold not his mercy. List to me, child of my love,” and he bowed his knee as he spoke.—“Should the clouds of evil destiny scud before this single dawning of blessedness; should I live to set foot in my own green isle, in my own loved inheritance—I will rear an altar unto worship—I will give to the church, the ready offering of many an enwrapped and pious spirit—I will build a holy house: and it shall stand a crying record of human gratitude;—and I will make it a cell to, and I will people it with the white monks of Cisteaux!”

“Ah! grant it, Heaven!” aspirated Matilda. “But now of the present, my father; the future lies hid in gloom.”

“The present tokens good to come,”

eagerly rejoined Walter—"I hail the gleam of a distant pharos—I feel the warmth of a rising sun! Know you not, that love is the darling passion of man's soul?—that abused and outraged love, is the goading fiend which despoils man of his nature? There lurks a goading fiend to quicken the overthrow of John of England: he has trodden on the slumbering asp, and its sting will pierce, spite of his regal glory. Perchance, some other season, I may tell you more: now must we to rest, lest the mental tax be ill fashioned to the body's fitness."

"Not to rest—I cannot rest to-night," urged Matilda: "suspense will scare sleep, and conjecture conjure a thousand fantasies. I would question of this uncle, my dear father; of this marvellous resurrection from death to life?"

"He lives!" said Walter, joyfully; "he has breasted all the breakers of adverse fortune, and in him closes the season

son

son of inertness. Hope points to the clang of battle; hope glitters in the spear and the sword. I go hence, my child, called upon by Heaven and by nature: I join the forces of Philip of France, and in the downfall of the traitor John, regain my forfeit honours. Droop not, Matilda: have I not said the unknown gardener of the white monks of Cîteaux may yet wield thunder; and with God's good grace, transfer the spade into the weapon of retributive vengeance?"

Matilda strove to smile, strove to bosom her father's hope; but there was a chilling dread within which combated against her: the chances of war pressed on her weak spirit; and the reckless murderer of the defenceless Arthur, promised no quarter to a conquered foe.—“Father,” she said, and terror palsied her accent, “if Heaven wills the victory to John of England, where lies my surety for thee?”

“What boots it, so that the cause be  
just,

just, whether we die in the field, or whether we gasp forth life, in sickness and in sufferance?" asked Walter. "The natural bed of a soldier's rest is the field: and as by transgression man entailed death, so must the pass from health to death, be better suiting, than the slow gradations of sure and morbid ailment. Alack! 'tis but to dwell on the storms of this world, to envy the gory bier of the brave." Matilda looked up, and the usually wan cheek of her father betrayed the hectic of strong emotion: 'twas grief which swam in his eye; yet did he struggle down the rising flood, and wrestle for the mastery of feeling.—"My brother," he pursued, "augurs success in the conjunction of arms and strength. Hugh le Brun, earl of Marche, moves a firebrand in the ranks of Philip Augustus: he is swayed by deadly hate and rancorous jealousy: for the despoiler John—like unto David, the anointed of Israel—has rifled his pet-lamb, and transferred

ferred it to the gorgeous folds of his own bosom. Ah ! you marvel at man's turpitude—and you must marvel—and you will weep at woman's weakness. 'Tis a long story, my child, and it wades through treachery, and frailty, and falsehood : a father lured from honour, and a maiden apostatizing her vows."

" Monstrous !" murmured Matilda, and she crept closer to the side of Walter, and she gazed on him in wondering interest.

" Time is flitting," he resumed, " and bideth not our wishes. At day-dawn I journey hence, and much still does it import me to say. I journey with my brother, Matilda ; and I journey to crave a sanctuary for thee."

" For me, my father ?"

" Ay, girl ; I would place thee with some honourable matron, and then, grappled to the wrongs of the earl of Marche, will I dare the brunt of Fortune. Look up, and smile in hope : I will woo her  
favour



favour with my sword's point; and when begirt with honour, will I reclaim thee, as my prime blessing."

"Alas!" sighed Matilda, "ere that season dawn, how many hours must intervene; hours of suspense; hours of bitterest anguish!"

"Perchance, less in number, than thy fears computeth," quick rejoined Walter. "There is a tide in the affairs of men: mine has been long on the ebb; and who can say the re-confluence teem not with blessings? Hope the best, dear one; sufficient for human strength is the real tribulation."

"It may be so," said Matilda; "but who can still the waves of frightened tenderness? Dear father, when you are far away, how can I school my fears?—how moderate anxiety?—how teach the busy mind to rest upon its wishes? Even here, in this solitude, where I know you hid from enmity, and safe from the malice of human interference;  
even

even here, where I read nought save innocence, and harmony, and peace, when chance you tarry beyond your usual hour, my heart beats, and my terrors rise in tumult."

"Habit and local circumstances often gender weakness," remarked Walter, yet he held her to his bosom as he spoke, and he kissed the tear from her beaming eye.

"It may be weakness," replied Matilda, "but methinks it augurs strength in affection. Dearest father, should I lose you, where upon earth is my stay?"

The query inflicted more than a passing pang in the heart of Walter; it was a query, which, ere now, had scared sleep from his pillow: for the sex, the youth, the innocence, the extreme loveliness of Matilda, ill fashioned her for the snares and tempests of the world: he knew the laxity of custom; and he knew, that woman, portionless and friendless, was as a licensed mark, for the thoughtless, the profligate, and the idle. All his vi-  
sions

sions of glory faded in the reality of her desolateness, and the deep sigh he breathed, and the momentary contraction of his brow, noted the struggle of his feelings.—“Should I lose you,” she continued, clinging fondly to him, “must I tarry here, my father, a tax on the brothers of St. Mary? or, must I from strangers crave a precarious bounty?”

“Holy Jesu!” and Walter started as though a ghost had crossed him—“you, a wanderer—you, a mendicant, living on cold chance and colder charity! Forbid it, all ye hosts of heaven! You, born to hold the cup of plenty, and to pour forth doles to all who needeth; you, doomed to beggary in a land of strangers;—doomed—and by a father doomed, to the storms of spirit-killing dependence! Ah, my child!” and he drooped his head upon her shoulder, “this is the worm, the ravening worm, which gnaws upon my vitals.”

“I would but guard against possible ill,” said Matilda, timidly; “I would  
but

but crave counsel for the future. Why then, dear father, conjure back the cares of the past?"

"And think you," he asked, "I can ever lose sight of the past?—think you, whilst memory holds her seat, I can forget the wreck I have wrought? No, Matilda: it will rankle to the hour of my death; it will embitter the parting pang of soul and body. But for you, my daughter, Fortune could boast no ill to scare; but for you, I could be proof against all her arrows; but for you, I could defy the shafts of human malice, and wane out life in endurance and in woe. 'Tis to see you here; to know you in a station so ill befitting your birth and your merit, which sharpens the scourge of self-reproach, and urges to desperation."

"And is it desperation alone, my dear father," fearfully questioned Matilda, "which causes your journey to Gueret? Is it for me, you cast off the security of  
dis-

disguise, and dare again the shoals and the quicksands of the world?"

"No: 'tis Heaven's high will, revealed in the miraculous preservation of my brother Hugh," exclaimed Walter; "'tis this behest of mercy, now dappling with sunshine my gloomy path! I lost him, my child, amid storms and horrors—I find him, the ready pilot to steer me back to honour! He rises as though from the grave; he bids me hence; and shall I tardily linger, and leave him alone to breast the breakers? No; forbid it all that man holds sacred! forbid it gratitude! forbid it courage! I go to Gueret to seek a sanctuary for you. Still doomed to darkness and to mystery, the dangerous secret of birth and name must be withheld: you must know yourself the offspring of the gardener Walter. I doubt not your prudence; but the proscribed name of your house, might hurl on your innocent head, ruin and persecution. Ignorance,  
my

my darling girl, is a surer cloak than policy."

Was it pride which tugged at the heart of Matilda, or it was the inherent curiosity of woman?—"Dear father," she asked, "should the prosperous and the happy taunt at my humble seeming, must I still all the proud waves, rising and swelling in my bosom?"

"Ay, and you must teach your bosom humility and meekness," rejoined Walter; "you must, in your intercourse with the world, foil the arrogance of low-minded malice, with the cutting, stinging weapons of contempt. Pride, my child, is the best safeguard to woman's honour: nurture it as such in your breast; but give not words to pride: let it shew itself in discretion, in that outward seeming, which confounds presumption, and overawes effrontery. Young as you are, and fair as you are, without the bulwark of name and of heritage, many will flutter around the  
bright

bright blaze of your beauty; many, like the invidious palmer, will seek to corrupt with words of glozing flattery: then, then, Matilda," and his eyes kindled fire, "be pride the wary sentinel;—then, let your inward heart swell in the consciousness of high descent;—then, be the spirit of your forefathers, be the honour of your country, be the patron saint of Ireland, an indemnity from lurking ill!"

"Of Ireland!" echoed Matilda, and then she ceased, for the lips and the cheek of Walter, turned white, as the lawn on her bosom.

"Did I say of Ireland?" he asked, and he trembled in every limb.

"Ay, my father, but no more," eager to assure him; "you revealed neither name or abiding place: and Ireland, forsooth! like unto France or England, tokens nought of solution."

"Yet would I recall the idle word," said Walter, fearfully; "would I strip away every  
every

every clue, which tending to possible recognition, might confound you in the calamities of our house. Holy Heaven! even now, when my heart glories in the deeds of my sire; when tracing the bright track of his heroism, the enterprises of his dauntless spirit, shine as a halo around his tomb—even now, must I choke down the swelling honour, and currry safety beneath an hireling guise. Yes, Walter the labourer—Walter, the unknown gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, is—*must* be your father. Mark me, Matilda; be the temptation ever so strong, be the tempter ever so witching, the boast of blood, the pride of ancestry, must lie deep, deep buried within your own breast; you must still the rising tide, and pray for meekness, pray for humility, pray for grace to stem the breakers. Nay, further, dear one, list to me, and pen up my counsels. You must know nought beyond this unmarked corner of Marche; this——”

“ Alack !



“Alack! what further knowledge can I boast?” interrupting him; but Walter motioned to silence.

“You may talk of the flowery banks of the Gartampe,” he pursued, “of the relics preserved in the sacristy of St. Mary’s, of the pious abbot and the holy brotherhood: but nought, appertaining to better days or brighter prospects; nought, to involve safety, by awakening surmise. In the world, upon which circumstances and necessity may launch you, I could wish,” and he smothered down a sigh, “nought of mystery to settle on your brightness: at best, ’tis a mildew on maiden fame, rousing the malice of tongues, and daring the serpent-tooth of detraction. No, not even to her who may become your patroness, must you breathe ought to awaken busy calculating wonder; you must leave all to time and to Heaven; you must tarry in quiet uncomplaining peace, and win favour through your own gentleness.”

Ma-

Matilda caught the hand of her father, and she held it with the clasp of anguish.—“ And you—and you,” she faltered.

Walter turned aside his face; his heart, like her own, was full; his eyes, like her own, flowed over.—“ If on earth,” he said, “ I shall be toiling for you.”

There was a pause, there was a mournful pause, which gave time for thought and for sorrow: Matilda pictured an eternal parting, and her courage died within her: Walter mused upon the casualties of chance and war, and he too caught the numbing influence of despondence.—“ If it should be so,” he at length pronounced, struggling for speech and for fortitude, “ the mighty hand, the stretched-out arm, which has upheld my brother in the storm, will uphold your innocence. Though I would die ere I would doom your youth to the blight of the cloister, still, should the world frown,

my Matilda, should the sorrows of the parent descend upon the unoffending child, the cloister holds forth a sanctuary; it will mar the machinations of the wicked, and shield from the gnawing rancour of envy."

"Know it my resource in the season of strife and peril," solemnly exclaimed Matilda. "Yes, my father, should calamity lower upon my prospects here, I will ponder on your words, and turn to Heaven, as to the bourn of my hopes."

"A nun," mused Walter, long after the impression had faded from the mind of Matilda; for she had dropped asleep upon the settle, and momentarily was she lost to all those busy cares which pressed upon the spirits of her father;—"a cold and joyless candidate for grace, through the martyrdom of Nature's best and dearest feelings; a living, breathing monument of scared affection and blasted hope, withering, as a rose in the bud, and dying beneath the scourge of self-infliction."

infliction. God—God reverse the doom!" he aspirated; "crown her youth with honours and with blessings! her age, with a progeny emulous of her virtues!"

Was it his voice, or was it the signal from without, which roused Matilda to the consciousness of her fears and her perplexities? She started into being at the moment that Walter threw open the door of the cottage; and when her eyes encountered a stranger, she shook back her dark hair, and she arose, lovely in beamy bashfulness. It was the rose of maiden modesty which blushed upon her cheek; and it kindled, and it spread, even to her temples, when in the stranger she recognised her escort through the wood: he bowed, and she felt the pulses at her heart quicken; he spoke, and that beautiful rose, fading, gave place to the usurping lily. The palmer gazed in wonder: Walter took her hand; he spoke not, but he held it with a pressure which seemed to ask for ex-

planation. She trembled—she could scarcely stand: again was her very bosom died in rosy consciousness: it was a moment of wild and overpowering agitation; a moment of bewilderment and surprise, and she wondered at her own emotion.—“This—this my father’s brother,” she faltered out, and then she bent her knee, as though to crave a blessing.

“No, lady, not so honoured—not so favoured,” murmured the unknown, and quick raising her, he bowed upon the hand he held. “I am the willing messenger of your uncle,” he pursued, “and fain would I be your father’s friend.”

Walter coldly bowed; he marked him with a doubtful eye, and he folded his arms, impatient of explanation. The stranger stepped back; his smile of conciliation vanished, and he met him, with a brow, as proud and unbending as his own.

Matilda

Matilda rallied to exertion; she sprung to the side of her father—"My champion! my friend in the hour of need!" she whispered.

Walter held forth his hand.—"Your pardon," he exclaimed: "a man of honour knows how to estimate a man of honour; yet where poverty lacketh aught save pride, pride is tenacious." His manner, his look, betokened candour: it was genuine impulse; for though too proud to curry favour, still could he feel and own obligation for service.

The stranger grasped the gage of amity, and his own native smile, so replete with sweetness and urbanity, played, like mellowing sunshine, o'er his features.—"No more," he said: "however questionable be my appearance here, my mission sideth on the score of service. The man who claims in you a brother's interest, bid me speed you—not to Guret, but to the camp of the confederate

lords, of Normandy, Poitou, and Aquitaine. The blood-red flag of war is unfurled, and John of England trembles for his transmarine possessions."

Walter snatched at the cloak of the palmer—"John of England!" he echoed, and his smile spoke exultation and transport.

"Perchance," significantly remarked the stranger, "in the camp we may meet in different characters. My errand, is to summon the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux from his drone-like calling: anon we may know each other better."

Walter looked an indignation he dared not utter; it was pride, it was mortification, it was rankling ire, which tugged at his heart-strings.—"And you?" he asked, and he fixed on the unknown, an eye, as though to dive into the hidden folds of his confidence.

The palmer smiled.—"I move with the vassals of Hugh le Brun, earl of Marche,"

Marche," he said, and then he turned to Matilda, and uttered something of broken rest and unseasonable intrusion : but her thoughts were too full of sadness to join in the light interchange of courtesy ; she bowed her head, but she spoke not. " Lady," he continued, " but to scare your gentleness with the detail of a soldier's hardship, I could fearfully contrast your home-comforts. Know you the usages of a camp ?"

Matilda glanced at her father.

" My daughter," observed Walter, " knows her *breviary*, and her home-duties : beyond, what lack we in woman ?"

" In woman," fervently pronounced the palmer, " we lack, and we find, the balm of life : sometimes, I grant you, our bane ; oftener our blessing."

" True, their tenderness and their faith, is as a honeyed drop in our cup of bitters," replied Walter. " But I cry your pardon, I would further of the gal-



lant Hugh: what bodes the change in our parting projects?"

"It bodes good to the cause of justice and humanity," returned the palmer. "Your brother Hugh, wedding his sword to Philip Augustus, will greet you—not at Gueret, but in the camp at Loches. Fear not, fair maid"—for he saw a pallid hue steal over the cheek of Matilda—"right and humanity strips even war of its terrors."

"But not of its perils," sighed Matilda.

"A warrior knows nought of peril," quick rejoined the stranger: "firm as the steel beneath which it palpitates, his heart grows big at the threat of peril."

"Peril to the brave," exclaimed Walter, "is as rest to the weary, re-nerving, re-inspiring, renovating every impulse, and bracing every energy: peril"—and his smile and his look tokened the soldier rather than the husbandman—"quicken the vigour of resolution, and rouses

rouses into life and into action, the dull and dormant spirit: peril——” He met the searching eye of the palmer, and he ceased, lest feeling should outstrip policy.

“ We shall meet in the camp at Loches,” significantly repeated the palmer; then drawing a signet-ring from his finger, and extending it to Walter—“ This will serve as a passport through the barriers,” he pursued; “ and when within the camp, it will find ready entrance to the private presence of the duke of Louvain, or the earls of Boulogne, Angoulesme, and Marche. Preserve it carefully, and use it as occasion best serves.”

Walter took the ring.—“ We shall draw sword on the same side,” he said. “ The murderer of the duke of Britany, absolves even a subject from his oath of allegiance.”

“ The murderer of the duke of Britany,” exclaimed the stranger, “ wars alike with Heaven and with man: his

crimes and his treasons, hurl him beyond the reach of human mercy."

"Curse him! curse him!" vehemently ejaculated Walter. "My enemy—my hated bitter enemy! the ruin of my race! the scourge of my native land! Curse him! curse him!"

"John of England!" pronounced the palmer, and he grasped in cordial amity the outstretched palm of Walter; then sinking his voice to a whisper—"Alike my bane," he continued; "poisonous and hateful as is the death-dealing adder." He paused, for the almost audible shudder of Matilda recalled him to the consciousness of her presence: he met her eye of sorrow and mild reproach: alternately did it wander from her father to himself, and it beamed an expression of such Christian charity, of such bleeding pity, that it seemed to deprecate the wrath she could not qualify.—"You are a novice, lady," he said, "in the rankling passions of the human mind: all peace,  
and

and love, and mercy, within, how can you resolve the jarring bursts of discordant hate?"

"Such knowledge would ill befit her age and sex," observed Walter. "Almost from the cradle, ought of change from domestic duty, has lain in brief visits to the convent-chapel. Perchance," and he spoke with deep sorrow, "my own irreligious repining is all she has ever dreamt of murmur or discontent. But I pray you, alone of our warlike calling: day peeps in the east, and I would be chary of time."

"Further explanation awaits you in the camp at Loches," said the stranger. "Enriched with the blessings of the pious fathers of the church, myself, and my brother palmers, at sunrise depart from St. Mary's." As he spoke, he moved towards the door; then pausing—"Fair maid," he resumed, "if favour be owned at my hands, be your prayers my coveted guerdon."

“ My prayers on the just cause,” murmured Matilda; “ my thanks and my gratitude to you !” Scarce conscious of the movement, she stretched forth her hand, and the tear which gemmed her dewy eye, bore evidence of feeling. The next instant the palmer knelt at her feet; she felt his warm lip upon her hand; she heard his half sigh as he arose: it lingered—it fanned her very cheek. She met his mildly beaming glance; it spoke sorrow; it spoke adieu:—it might be the last adieu:—her heart sickened; she shrunk timidly back; she bowed her face upon her bosom to veil emotion, and when she looked up the palmer was gone.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ Who art thou? Thy garb bespeaks thee holy !  
 Thy mission augurs good !  
 Suspicion be of earth, and faith of heav’n—  
 I’ll nought of earth—but all of heav’n be mine.”

THE morn which rose on the departure of Walter, was a morn of cloudless brilliancy: the garish sun reflected the sparkling dewdrops, for the bent bush, dappled with a thousand blossoms, hung pendent with the tears of night. Matilda had listened to the last blessing, had shared the last embrace, with a feeling of tempered sadness; for he had bid her cherish the gayest day-dreams; he had spoken of coming favour, and he had promised yet to steer her from mystery and gloom: and she kept her station at the garden-gate, and she watched his

his receding figure, and she prayed for his safety, with an eurapt and fervent spirit. There is a season in human life, in which illusion puts forth the brightest colours, and hope the fairest promises; in which, despondency flits as a summer cloud, and futurity wears the burnish of *setless* sunshine! the season, to borrow the figurative language of the poet—

“ When youth and graver womanhood divide  
The lovely prize, and childhood's playful lightness  
Lurks in the sportive smile; beams in the eye's young  
brightness.”

That season, that witching season, now shed its peachy down upon the cheeks of Matilda, imparting buoyancy to her fancy, and bliss to her heart: care she had none, and fear she had none; and ought of sorrow, so transient, that the tear and the smile, like twin blossoms, hung upon the same stem: the tear, for the touching calls of feeling;—and smiles, sportive smiles, the sunny harbingers of  
native

native good-will ! She was confiding—she was tender—she was credulous ; too noble for suspicion, and too candid for disguise : fashioned by the precepts of her father, who, like Prospero, made her—

“ ————— More profit  
Than others, that have more time  
For vainer hours,”

she had a spirit firm in the cause of right, and a soul proud in the consciousness of honour ! The heroine of fitful story, living in an age of darkness, of violence, and of blood, she was born for trial, she was born for endurance, and the embryo springs of native greatness, waited but the igniting fire of opportunity to kindle them into flame.

The day waned, and the vesper-service in St. Mary's chapel brought with it the remembrance of the palmer : Matilda glanced around, but the spot on which he had knelt was vacant, and the brothers of the order alone peopled the aisles.

Solemn



Solemn and emphatic was the voice of the officiating priest, and the deep full tones from the organloft, thrilled on her wrapt ear, long after she had lost sight of the convent. She struck into the copse-wood; she pursued her lonely path: wild and inexplicable were her musings; they encompassed more than her father, more than her father's safety: it was the seductive smile of the stranger; it was his step of dignity, and his bow of graciousness, which lived in her fancy.—“ Shall we ever meet again?” she thought, and the first sigh, untinctured with a father's sorrow, rose in her bosom. Hapless Matilda! bright be the surface, but stormy the ocean of passion; like flower-bespangled tendrils, creeping, and clinging, and close-veiling the mouth of the abyss, it may muffle, but not ensure! She slept, and she dreamt of war and of warriors: the morning brought its accustomed duties, and many mornings rose, and  
many

many evenings closed, and still was Walter absent.

It was long after the third sunset, when the west was verging into grey, and the shadows of evening quick confounding earth and sky, that the lifting the latch, and the opening the wicker gate, gave token of an arrival. All heart, all hope, she flew to the door; she stretched forth her arms in joy and gratulation: the next instant she shrunk back: it was not her father—it was a stranger who advanced towards her. He was habited in the dun vestments of the church, and his face was close muffled in his cowl.—“ I seek the dwelling of Walter, the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux,” he said; “ and I bear to the ear of his daughter, the greeting of his safety.”

“ God be praised !” murmured Matilda, and she led into the cottage. The stranger followed; he closed the door, and then he sunk on the nearest settle,

as though worn out with toil. "You have travelled far," said Matilda, "and strength, holy father, tallies not with will. I pray you, take rest"—and then she busied herself in spreading before him the cottage store.

"My blessing light upon thee, maiden!" said the friar, and then again he sunk into stillness, and he seemed to commune within himself; but he touched not the roots or the fruit, neither did he remove his muffling hood. Matilda stood impatient and anxious: he seemed as the messenger of her fate, and yet she knew not how to question. "When thy father parted hence," at length he pronounced; and then he paused.

"When my father parted hence," eagerly exclaimed Matilda, yielding to her feelings, and panting for solution, "his errand was to seek me a resting-place."

"And he has found thee a resting-place," resumed the friar; "he——"

"And

“ And a patroness to abide with ? ” interrupted the artless girl.

“ Ay, damsel, a friend to protect and to soften down all the ills of life.”

“ Dear, kind father ! ” ejaculated Matilda : “ and will he fetch me hence ? for alack ! ” and she spoke with energy and feeling, “ ’tis weary solitude to abide alone.”

“ The heart is ill framed for solitude,” observed the stranger, “ and joys not in the immolation of its native impulses.”

“ Oh no ! ” fervently replied Matilda, “ it flutters like the poor bird, first caught in the gyves of the fowler.”

“ Man,” returned the friar, and diligently he perused her features, “ was not destined to abide alone : and woman, timid and defenceless, by nature and by habit, is far less fitting. Fairest creature ! ” and his accent sank to softness, “ this lone dwelling, and this blank solitude, grafts thought and care upon the springtide of thy bloom. Dost thou

thou picture nought beyond ?—dost thou sigh for nought beyond ?”

“ I would fain fashion my pictures and my sighs to the bounden limit of my duty,” answered Matilda. “ But I pray you, holy sir, of my dear father ? for much it behoves me to learn his pleasure.”

“ His pleasure is thy happiness,” said the friar ; “ and the study and the labour of his hours of absence, to hem thee in from harm. He greets thee at my hands, and he bids thee confide thyself to me, his lowly messenger.”

“ As how ?” and Matilda pressed closer to his side.

“ As one who knoweth how best to ensure thy preservation,” quick rejoined the stranger. “ Youth and innocence, like thine, are ill fitted to this season of strife and turmoil : the provinces are in arms, and hostile parties, rise, and clash with each other.”

“ And will you speed me to my dear father ?”

father?" asked Matilda. "Oh, be brief then, for in his presence is safety!"

"No, not to your father, maiden, but to the sanctuary your father has wisely chosen."

"To a convent!" and Matilda looked the terror she could not speak.

"Dreadest thou to sojourn in the house of God?" demanded the friar. "If so, whither wouldst thy fancy tend thee?"

"To my father—to the active calls upon my duty and my exertion," firmly replied Matilda. "Holy sir, I would abide with my father even in the camp: if wounded, if oppressed, if worn down with fatigue and hardship, I would minister to his comfort; I—I—Heaven forefend my feelings be not sinful, but if called upon, methinks, I could dare a world in the cause of affection!"

The friar placed his spread hand upon her arm; it was fevered, wellnigh to burning, and it shook as with mortal palsy :

palsy : she glanced inquisitively on him, and he drew it cautiously back. To an adept in the all-powerful workings of human passion, the garb of the church had been as a covering of gossamer : to Matilda it was impenetrable and holy, and the pause which ensued was attributed by her to age and ailment.

“ In the cause of the heart thou wouldst endure unto death,” at length observed the stranger ; “ for the man thou couldst love, thou——”

“ For my father,” interrupting him.

“ And not for thy lover ?” abruptly questioned the friar.

Matilda thought of the palmer ; the blush gathered on her cheek, and she cast her timid eyes on the ground.

“ In the world,” continued the stranger, recovering his self-presence, “ love is said to be the master-passion of the soul. I had forgotten, forsooth ! that in this solitary nook of earth, likened unto the cloister’s gloom, the sway, and  
the

the passions, and the usages of the world, are alike unknown."

Matilda only sighed.

The stranger noted and brooded o'er that sigh, and earnestly did he peruse her lovely features, as there to find solution.—"Maiden," he resumed after a pause, "I would covet thy confidence. I would bear thee hence; but first would I learn, whether one remain to complain of broken vows and blighted promises? Lives there one—breathes there one, to hold back thought, in despite of enjoined duty?"

"What mean you, father?" and Matilda raised her dark eyes, and doubt and wonder spoke in the glance.

"I mean, that I would save thee from the crime of perjury," said the friar: "daughter, I would guard thee from the wrath to come. Fear not to tell me, if one, born and bred to toil, unprized by fortune, and unmarked by  
favour :



favour: one, lacking the distinction of rank and heritage; one——”

He ceased, for indignation and outraged feeling burnt even to the brow of Matilda.—“Not so,” she exclaimed: “be the weakness of my nature, pride, rather than degeneracy;” and she too ceased, for she traced much of irony in the steadfast gaze of the friar: yet when in the accent of unfeigned amazement, he pronounced—“The daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux!” although that pride writhed beneath the smart, she shrunk not, neither did she betray one sign of mortification.

“Ay, even so, holy sir,” she rejoined; “the daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux; yet free—free as yon expanse ’twixt earth and sky—free to perform my father’s will!”

“I fear me, thou hast a lawless spirit,” remarked the stranger, yet his eyes tokened admiration rather than reproof.

“Peradventure,” said Matilda, artlessly,

lessly, "it may be called upon, ere my errand on earth be accomplished. But I crave your pardon, father: abide we till to-morrow? or depart we hence to-night?"

"But for thy safety, I would say on the instant," answered the friar. "Maiden, thy safety is more precious than frankincense. We must move in goodly fellowship?"

"The auspices of the church be ever goodly fellowship," observed Matilda. "Now, if you judge fitting; or anon, with the earliest daydawn."

"The church owns but feeble influence over the wills of sinful men," returned the friar. "Riot and outrage spread through the provinces, and thy sex and youth ill fashion thee to the venture: distracted, and banded by party-feeling, force usurping the sway of justice, each noble heads his armed band, and trusts in the temper of his sword. Think thee, should chance tan-

gle us in the snare, where lies our surety for safety?"

"War they with age and helplessness?" asked Matilda, "or seek they nobler adversaries? God wot, the conquest of you or me, would be to garner shame, not glory!"

The friar smiled.—"Belike," he said, "the prize might meet a higher estimate. Beauty, like thine, fair maid, is as a jewelled bait to wondering eyes! I know the depths of human daring, and well I know, life is as nought beneath the goad of human passion. There are those, who would risk a world, and more than a world; there are those, who would barter heaven for one smile of favour."

"The saints be praised, I know nought such!" fervently exclaimed Matilda.

"Yet picture such," quickly resumed the stranger; "believe such: credit the flight of such a passion: give fancy wing: paint all which is daring, all which

which is firm, faithful, ardent, wellnigh idolatrous. How feelest thou, maiden? Wouldst thou pay such zeal with kindness? wouldst thou——”

“What mean you, father?” and Matilda drew back, abashed and trembling.

“I mean,” artfully replied the friar, “to probe to the very quick of strength and principle, to learn the foundation-stone of dependance, and fashion thy young heart to the perilous calling, ere I lead thee forth into the world; I mean ——”

“My father,” interrupted Matilda, “has taught me all befitting my sex and station; my father, holy sir, with unslumbering diligence, has framed my mind to life’s vicissitudes.”

“The gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux!” again pronounced the stranger.

“My father,” and Matilda spoke with unguarded haste, “was not born the—

the—the——” She paused, and she bent her face, in burning consciousness.

“How, maiden! then is thy father other than he seemeth?”

“My father is my best friend,” quick rejoined Matilda; “and my father’s will, the unerring rule of my worldly actions.”

“But not born to labour,” and he fixed his eyes intently on her.

“I did not say so; surely—surely—” she faltered; then, with eager earnestness—“Are we not all born to labour? are we not all born to toil out an inheritance hereafter?”

“Thou art a casuist,” remarked the stranger, “and much I err, if thy speech savoureth of sincerity. Man, most true, is born to labour, and his labour ceases with his life. But time warrants not our further disquisition, neither need we dare the perils of war and casualty: our course is smooth and sure: the friend, to whose guardianship  
thy

thy father consigns thee, provides all necessary to thy comfort." Matilda looked with glad surprise. "A litter," pursued the friar, "for thy personal ease, and an armed train for thy protection."

"And when we move hence," questioned Matilda, "whither points our course?"

"To a spot, remote from strife and violence," continued the stranger; "a spot, hemmed in with all of human strength, where the rumour of war may penetrate, but not its miseries."

"And my father?"

"Your father," after a momentary pause, "will firmer tread the arduous track of duty, assured of thy security. And now, maiden, tarry in peace till morning dawn, and slumbers tend thy pillow!"

But though thus bidden, and enriched with the blessings of her stranger-guest, sleep, the coveted balm to weary woe,

tended not the pillow of Matilda : her mind was agitated ; her spirits wildly perturbed : she mused o'er the years of peace which had flown within her cottage-shelter, and she wept the coming flight from all the local ties of childhood. The hazards and the terrors of war crowded on her sick fancy ; and if for a moment she lost the power of consciousness, it was to dream of blood and turmoil, to hear the groans of pain, to see the pangs of sufferance, to pass from the field of slaughter to the morbid cell of captivity, to linger amid chains, and racks, and horrors, too complex to methodize, and far too wild to embody. Once she started erect, for she heard the tramp of feet, and quick followed the whispering of voices : she listened : it was not fancy : the sounds ascended from the garden : she stole from the bed ; she took her station at the casement : dawn's wreathy vapours still clung to the woods and pastures, yet distinctly did she discern

cern the friar parleying with a man at the wicket-gate. He seemed as though he had grown into height since the hour of parting; for though he still wore his cloak and hood, he stood more upright, and his movements appeared more sinewy than when she had trembled for his safety. His companion too was cased in armour; and that companion, seemed to look with deference, and listen with profound attention. For many moments they continued in deep commune; and the soldier—if soldier he was—once raised a horn slung at his girdle: the friar held his arm to stay the movement: the horn fell, and again they sunk into profound talk.

“What can all this mean?” mused the wondering girl; and quick did her doubts resolve themselves in the necessary preparation for her removal: this, then, under the immediate direction of the friar, was one of the party provided for her escort, and the signal-horn to rally the

F 4

scattered



scattered remnant. Satisfied and assured, she drew cautiously back, for the armed stranger departed, and the friar returned to the house : but all inclination to sleep had fled her eyelids ; she was young and romantic ; and she lived in an age of romance, and this, the first page of adventure, seemed unfolding itself in brightness. She was called, as it were, to a new world, and she peopled it with the creatures of her own fervid fancy : the women, tender as the gentlest zephyr ; the men, brave as the heroes of Grecian story ! A thousand visions, floating, like rays of glory, filled up the measure of her hopes : the palmer rose preeminent in every dream of bliss : she heard his voice of melody ; she met his eye of flame : he was her standard of ideal perfection—and young Love nestled in her bosom, long ere she dreamt his power.

Trained to the offices of pious faith, she bowed her knee in prayer, grateful for the security of the past, and imploring

ing mercy on the future: and then she busied herself in necessary preparations for her journey; and when she descended from her chamber,

“ The golden oriental gate<sup>\*</sup>  
Of greatest heaven,  
Hurled his glistening beams !”

and earth and sky glowed with redundant bounty ! The cheeks and the eyes of Matilda bore record to the buoyancy of her spirit ; a beamy smile played o’er her features, and her look was fresh and fair,

“ As morning roses newly wash’d with dew.”

The friar met her with a gladsome salutation, and when she craved his blessing, he placed his spread hand, as though to wave back the luxuriant clusters of her glossy hair, and he seemed to linger in the murmured benison : his accents sunk to softness as he questioned of her hours of repose, and he listened to her answers with enwrapt attention. Quick

followed the meal of morning, and then he spoke of departure, not with decision, but to win her sanction.—“Our progress must be slow, and our journey tedious,” he remarked. “It is thy care, and thy comfort, maiden, which shall sway our movements.”

“I am ready, holy sir,” said Matilda; and as soon as the door had closed upon the friar, she heard the shrill blast of a horn, and almost with the rapidity of echo, the like sound was repeated at a further distance. Soon did a moving host halt at the garden-gate. Matilda felt her heart droop within her; a sudden and fearful presentiment crowded on her spirits: it seemed as the parting with a dear friend, and her eyes swam in tears as she glanced around the cottage.—“Shall I ever return? shall I ever again behold this, ~~my~~ first home?” she asked.

“Ay, if thy heart yearn after it,” replied the friar; “Trust me, fair one, nought shall be wanting to thy felicity.”

Matilda

Matilda yielded her hand.—“Forgive me, father,” she sobbed out—“I am not graceless, not thankless; but I feel more than my lips can utter; I feel that within which beggars words.”

“Think of the future,” urged the stranger; “think of a new home—of a home more fashioned to thy merits; of tenderness—of a whole life’s devotion—of love—love, sweet maid; of——” Matilda started, and she looked inquisitively at him. “Ay, my daughter,” recovering all his policy—“of love, and holy friendship, and all that the spiritual heart best knows and values. Think of a home, safe in these perilous times, and bless the hand which guides thee from the trial. Thy father, damsel, bids thee hence, and his counsel be thy stay.”

“My father!” repeated Matilda—“my dear father!” and then she chased away her tears, as though courage grew in the remembrance. “’Tis but a passing shower,” she observed, rallying back

a smile : “ through an April sky, the sun shines forth the brighter ! Now, holy sir, I am ready ! and peace light on this holy dwelling ! ”

She hurried forward as she spoke, her face close muffled in her wimple, and her eyes bent upon the ground : she feared to pause—she feared to look up—she feared to trust herself, lest she should encounter some new call upon her feelings. A strong arm lifted her into the litter ; yet she knew not whether it was the arm of the friar, for mingled grief, regret, and wonder, pressed upon her brain : not a word was spoken : the litter was close shut ; and when she felt it in motion, she sunk back, and burst into tears.

## CHAPTER V.

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“ ——— Gall me with scorn,  
And close am I as the closed sepulchre  
Shift the drift of honour, and deal forth grace,  
Then guile harbours not in the strange compound  
Of my nature ! A man, am I, forsooth !  
Shaped to the times, and as the times fitful.”

ALTHOUGH many a sorry league harassed the strength and tried the perseverance of Walter, still his strength and his perseverance failed not, and he toiled through the obstacles of morass, forest, and wilderness, with a spirit and a courage unbroken. The powers which had slumbered so many years, glowed with fresh vigour ; the indolence which had gendered in listlessness and inaction, yielded to this new call upon his efforts : his own private wrongs became grafted upon the injuries of the unfortunate prince

prince Arthur ; and he felt, that against the usurper and the murderer John, a host, countless as the sands upon the sea-shore, could not stay his ardour. Besides, a brother, risen, as it were, from death, sided with justice and humanity : and to fight at the side of that loved brother—to enrol himself beneath the banner of France—to aid in the downfall of the tyrant—to hurl him from his toppling pinnacle of uncertain greatness—was now the aim, the prayer, the coveted boon for which he lived : it superseded even the ties of nature ; and ever and anon, did the burning fire of indignation and hate, dry away the tears which marked the remembrance of his absent child.

“ Shame ! shame ! ” he would exclaim, as he wrestled with his best feelings—“ I have played the hind until I forget the warrior. Down, thou treacherous weakness ! Gift me, Heaven, with the rare bounty of a sword and opportunity ;

nity ; and if I wash not my wrongs in the best blood of England, be my name a recreant to my father's glory !"

But though he manfully struggled for the mastery of feeling, throughout the day he missed the soft voice of conciliation and comfort ; at night-fall too he recalled the caresses of Matilda, and he pictured her loneliness, until his heart flew back to his own home of peace, and he marvelled at the sacrifices he had made. The track of country through which he journeyed was lone and wild ; thick woods mantled the hills, and the vallies, enriched with the exuberant sports of nature, bore no single vestige of cultivation : the vine hung unpruned, and the fruit-tree bowed beneath its ruby store : meandering streams, like threads of liquid silver, shone through the brakes ; and rich clusters of vivid hues, dappling and varied, charmed the wrapt sense with infinite variety. Not as now, did the picturesque hamlet, and neat trimmed



trimmed town, glad the wearied spirits of the way-worn traveller; not as now, did the inviting inn smile a reprieve to his fatigues and to his labours: the greensward was the pillow of Walter, and the vaulted sky,

“Thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,”

his mighty canopy. He sunk to rest with Matilda in his heart, and he smiled, as though in reality he had bestowed the mighty benison.—“God bless my darling!” was the latest aspiration of his lips, and his slumbers were calmer and sounder than often lights upon the velvet couch of luxury.

The russet dawn, scattering the gloom of misty night, roused him to thought and action, and again, refreshed and eager, did he set forth on his venturous errand: it was to seek the camp at Loches—to crave an asylum for his innocent child—to know her in security—and then to devote his sword and life to the

the brave avengers of prince Arthur's murder. The tramp of horse-hoofs, and the clatter of steel, were the first sounds which spoke propinquity to a human being: he looked up, and he saw a troop of horsemen speeding down the shelving slope before him: he was unarmed and powerless; yet was his heart ill formed for retreat, and boldly he stood his ground, resolved to meet the issue. A shout and a sudden halt tokened discovery, and the next instant, though closely invested, daring a hundred sword-points, he looked defiance on the band.'

In the early annals of the thirteenth century, during the heavy struggle in which the arms and policy of Philip Augustus rended away the ancient patrimony of a rival house, despoiling England of all her transmarine provinces, and branding her monarch with cowardice and disgrace, daring and ambitious spirits, renouncing allegiance and trusting in their own strength, gave rein to hardihood,

dibood, and admitted no law save will; fire and pillage marking the feud of personal enmity, and every excess of outrage and despoliation, moving in the train of hostile party. Like unto England, France was one scene of violence and contention, and all her fair and promising hopes, her rich harvests and abundant stores, were ransacked and laid waste: the weak, oppressed by the strong; the strong, by those of mightier prowess. Philip Augustus, the superior lord of all, was himself swayed by sinister aggrandizement; for successively curbed by the sound policy of Henry the Second, and the martial genius of the lion-hearted Richard, now big with the project of expelling the puerile John, and annexing to his own crown, the vast fiefs, which for so many centuries had been dismembered from it,—blew with his own breath the hot flames of party malice, and traced in the vast scene of vigorous contention, the speedy fulfilment of  
of

of all his most coveted measures. Thus then was it, that the bold and the active, gathering into hosts, and surrounded by their armed vassals, moved like the waves of ocean, overwhelming all the sweet flowers of peace, and sweeping with one ruthless besom of civil contention.

The nobles, into whose power chance had thus thrown the fearless Walter, was the viscount de Thourars, brother to Guido, the second husband of Constance, widow of count Geoffry, and mother of Arthur duke of Britany; and Bertrand de Borne, viscount de Hautefort, who with their goodly train of tried and martial followers, were speeding to the succour of Ralph de Issodun, count D'Eu, close invested by the troops of king John in his castle of Driencourt. In times of peril, suspicion, watchful and eager, construes design in every movement, and espial in each chance innovator: and because, unlike the class of which his coarse  
and

and worn garb bespoke him, Walter sued not for mercy, he was roughly collared, and dragged before the chieftains.

"Is life too poor a boon to crave for?" asked the lord of Thouars.

"A lone and an unarmed man is safe with the brave," firmly replied Walter.

"True courage seeks contention."

"Who art thou?" demanded the viscount de Hautefort.

"A stranger to thee," answered Walter, "and a wayfarer, speeding on an embassy of my own."

"I would fain know thee better."

"It may chance so;" and Walter boldly raised his eyes to the face of his inquisitor.

"I would know, whence thou comest, and whither thou goest?" pursued De Borne.

"I come from my own poor home," said Walter; "and I go, forsooth! whither thou listeth, for strength gives thee the vantage over me."

"Then

“Then shalt thou go with us,” exclaimed De Thouars: “and for want of a better office, thou shalt lead one of the sumpter-horses.”

“And wilt thou bestow arms?” eagerly demanded Walter.

“Ay, if thou knowest how to use them.”

“Try me!” and Walter’s erect gait and hostile mien, his smile of courage, and his eye of fire, gave lie to his garb of lowliness.

“Thou art other than thou seemest;” and De Hautefort spoke in a voice sunk almost to a whisper.

A momentary flush deepened the bronzed cheek of Walter, then quick recovering himself—“Is courage confined to station?” he asked. “I did but bid thee try me, and if I prove a recreant, be my life the forfeit.” But though thus impelled from the solitary track he was pursuing, and pressed into the service of stranger guides, scarce had the first glow  
of

of enthusiasm died away, when the recollection of his brother, of the palmer, of his absent child, brought with them his destination to the camp at Loches as the paramount duty upon his exertions and his courage. Impulse had been the bane of his life; it had plunged him in error—it had tangled him in crime and woe—it had severed him from all the local ties of home—it had driven him to the cloak of disguise and mystery—it had reduced him to the drudgery of manual toil—yet still was his nature, impulse! and dauntlessly pressing to the side of the viscount de Thouars—“Time has been,” he exclaimed, “when neither caprice nor fear could give colour to my actions: now I must brave the hazard: we must part fellowship, my lord—I cannot journey to Driencourt.”

De Thouars viewed him with a severe and searching eye.—“Whence the change?” he demanded, “and what may I infer?”

“Its

“ Its rise is imperious circumstances,” replied Walter; “ and be the inference honour or dishonour, nought can stay me. ‘There are calls, my lord, imperative calls upon the man, which human policy dares not violate.’”

“ Methought,” significantly observed De Hautefort, “ thou wert a wayfarer, and journeying from thy own poor home: where then, lurketh the spring to shape thy movements?”

“ Here,” exclaimed Walter, fervently, and he placed his hand upon his heart. “ The secret springs of man’s action are alone known to himself: he may methodize his looks; he may mould his words to sinister colouring; he may ——” He ceased, for the eye of De Borne was arrested by the signet-ring on his finger;—it was the one given him by the palmer, and it seemed to possess the power of a talisman. The chieftains conversed apart, and Walter stood impatient of detention; agitation and  
anxiety



anxiety gathering each moment, and conjuring the terrors and the suspense of Matilda, almost to the detriment of life. Suddenly a new and a bright light broke upon the dark cloud of his fears—a light, as it were, from heaven, for it imparted joy and hope! Constance, the mother of the ill-starred duke of Brittany, was sister-in-law to the viscount de Thouars: to crave at her hands succour and protection, to obtain for his helpless child the boon of her patronage, would be to secure to her a friend in the hour of need, an asylum through all the changes of this life of chance.

“To the royal Constance, the injured mother of a murdered son, will I appeal for humanity and favour,” mused the sanguine Walter; “to her most secret ear will I reveal my wrongs and my sorrows, and casting off the muffle of disguise, convince her, that like unto herself, my hate to the tyrant John is deep and ruthless as the grave. As a  
mother,

mother, as a suffering outraged mother, she will analyze the feelings of nature—she will have pity—she will dispense the grace I covet—she will vouchsafe the charge—she will befriend thee, my blessed child:—and should woe and death betide me, thy known safety will be as balm; should——”

“How camest thou by yon signet?” demanded the viscount de Thouars.

Walter started, and the bright fabric of hope crumbled into air; he saw himself hemmed in by the bold followers of two adventurous leaders, close enveloped in mystery, and justly an object of suspicious doubt. But speedily recovering himself, and rallying back all his firmness—“Will it pass me among friends?” he asked.

“Marry, will it, to the secret ear of my liege the king!” exclaimed De Hautefort.

“Then be it a God-send!” ejaculated Walter. “My lord,” and he turned  
 VOL. I. G proudly

proudly to De Thouars, "the friend who bestowed this signet-ring, knew me fashioned to the trust. Not to the castle of Drieneourt, but to the camp at Loches, am I bidden."

"Strange," remarked the viscount, "thy garb befitteth not the errand"—and he surveyed him from head to foot.

"Appearances," said Walter, significantly smiling, "are often fallacious. My lord, in this world, dross may be mistaken for sterling gold: it is not the outward seeming which stamps the estimate. God wot! the speckled snake owns a skin gayer and brighter than the eel; yet is the one nutritive, the other baneful! I journey to Loches, on the errand dear to every honest heart, the errand of retributive justice."

"Espousest thou the wrongs of Hugh le Brun, earl of Marche?" eagerly interrogated De Hautefort.

"Aggression," firmly returned Walter, "has claim on every warrior-sword."

"Man,

“Man, thou art strangely gifted,” thoughtfully observed De ‘Thouars. “Fain would I know thee better.”

“Wilt thou befriend me with thy interest?” eagerly demanded Walter; “wilt thou grant a boon which will stamp me for life thy debtor?”

“Name it,” said the viscount.

“The ear of thy brother’s wife—of the lady Constance—of the mother of the ill-fated duke of Britany,” replied Walter. “I would seek her presence; I would crave her interference, as the sick man craves after health, as the condemned craves after respite.”

“As how?” and De ‘Thouars measured him with keen caution.

“I have a child, a daughter, a most dear daughter”—and his voice quivered with internal feeling—“a creature, my lord, more rarely gifted than myself; made up of all that is excellent, and needing now a shelter and protection.”

“Beshrew me!” said De Hautefort,

yielding to the mere pleasantry of a light heart, "the lack may soon be fitted. I have a home, and a sword, and an eye for beauty, and——"

"Have a care," interrupted Walter, and his lightning glance was wellnigh scathing; "'tis a chord which will not bear touching. The maid of whom I speak, is pure as unsunned snow; not slander's self can bay her actions."

"Mine was a random banter," said De Borne. "By the rood!" and he held forth his hand, "not for a princely dower would I wound the parent heart. Pardon me, stranger: honour and chivalry enjoin succour to the helpless, and perish the dastard who betrays the trust. I would draw sword with thee, but not, forsooth, in enmity, for judgment much belies me, if thine be maiden steel!"

"Enough, my lord," exclaimed Walter. "Like thine, be my sword the herald of my feelings. I war with the oppressor,

pressor, and rally on the side of the oppressed."

"With him who tramples on another's right?" quick interrogated De Hautefort—"with him, who heedless of law and honour, neglectful of all bond, human and divine, ravishes the hope of another's existence?"

"With the traitor uncle who filches away the just inheritance," rejoined Walter—"with John of England. But now of self, my lord," and he turned anxiously to De Thouars.—"This daughter, this innocent helpless child, needeth the shelter of a home. I would forthwith to the countess Constance, and then to Loches."

"Thy garb ill fashions thee for a lady's presence," remarked the viscount.

"I would I could doff my griefs as aptly as I can doff my habit," quick replied Walter. "Speed me, I pray, to the lady Constance, and willingly will I play thy herald."

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“ And when in her presence, what then?”

“ Why then I will appeal to her heart—I will neither garner nor detract from my story: and should she grant me favour, I will to the camp at Loches, and beard the murderer John, even to the death.”

“ Bosom'st thou no enmity, save the enmity of general disapproval, save the spontaneous abhorrence which virtue feels for vice?” asked De Thouars.

Walter stood for some moments thoughtful and silent: more, much more, than the general disapproval, than the spontaneous abhorrence of virtue to vice, resolved the crude acrimony of his feelings; yet could he not make bare the sorrows and the trials of his life, could he not explain the secret incitement, which spurred to hatred and revenge.—“ What more can man need,” he at length demanded, “ to cast the mite of his strength into the balance of  
bleeding

bleeding oppression, to league himself with the sworn foes of aggression and tyranny? I have known—I have groaned beneath the weight of arbitrary coercion.” Then with a labouring sigh—“The veil which shuts in the past must not be lifted: this is neither place nor season: mine is no idle plaint, or vamped-up story. Believe me, nobles, the heart which throbs beneath this plain and homely garb, fears death less than it fears dishonour.”

“I do believe thee, stranger,” said De Thouars; “and further, I will trust thee, even to thy wish. Furnished with horse and arms, I will speed thee straight to the presence of the lady Constance: doff then thy habit, and case thy limbs in steel: God’s truth, it will beseem thee better than yon dun cloak and hose! Nay, no thanks. Perchance we may meet in fields of war and blood; then pay back the debt, if debt there be, in vengeance on the foe.”

Walter's brave heart swelled high, when cased in the bright habiliments of war, he sought once more the presence of De 'Thouars: it was gratitude, it was exultation, it was a feeling betwixt pleasure and pain which quickened every pulse in his frame; he felt the bond of obligation, and his pride writhed; he felt the weight of a stranger's trust, and he estimated that trust, as a crying testimony, that genuine nobleness still harboured among men.—“ He knows me not,” mused Walter, as he tarried the parting commands of the viscount, “ and yet he confides in my bare faith; he bosoms neither doubt nor suspicion, although mystery cloaks my every action.” His birth, his rank, his name, his misfortunes, hung upon his lips; he had almost cast aside every muffle; he had almost explained the hidden cause of enmity to the king of England, when the voice of De Hautefort brought him back to policy and to himself.

“ By

“By our Lady, an army such as thou, and perish the claims of the usurper John!”

“I would all who wield sword possessed the like heart!” observed De Thouars; then turning to Walter—  
“Brave soldier—for thy eye speaks thee brave, and thy port a soldier—trusting in thy faith, as my especial messenger, I speed thee to Angers; and when within the castle, be this thy passport to the presence of the lady Constance;” and he gave into his hands, a slip of vellum, close sealed with his own signet. “And now farewell! God’s grace betide thee! Our duty calls us counter.”

Walter took the vellum—he bowed—he placed his spread hand upon his heart, but that heart was too full for utterance.

“Anon to meet again,” said De Hautefort; “belike in fields of strife and blood. Should it chance so, whether in masquerade, or in thy own true

person, seek out Bertrand de Borne—and be this good sword the pledge of fellowship betwixt us.” As he spoke, he loosened the weapon from his own thigh; and Walter, drawing the burnished blade from the scabbard, raised it to his lips, with a feeling bordering on devotion.—“ When I abuse the trust,” he faltered out—“ when I dishonour this bond of generous reliance, may my every hope be blasted!—may Heaven’s curse light alike upon me and mine!” Then with rallying cheerfulness—“ Perchance, my lord, this good sword may hew its way through the close phalanx of our foes; may deal out death, as now it deals out favour. Should it prove so, be it to the glory of our sworn league—be it to the honour of our joint trust—of France and of Philip Augustus!”

“ Ay, of France and of Philip Augustus!” repeated in one De Thouars and De Hautefort:—and every follower caught the sound, and every tongue reverberated

verberated the saying: and long after Walter had lost sight of the gallant company, did the welkin resound with the prolengthened echo, France and Philip Augustus!

## CHAPTER VI.

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" ————— Fate lies hid in shade:  
No human hand can raise the misty veil;  
No human eye can pierce the misty veil:  
It gathers, or it breaks, for Heaven's just end!"

THE last sunbeam tinged the west with golden splendour, as Walter neared the long-spied walls of Angers, as he marked her stately battlements and antique towers, breaking from the haze of distance, and stretching beside the silver margin of the rippling Mayenne: her castle, piled upon a steep bold rock, was as the pharos to the night-worn mariner;



it augured hope—it smiled a haven through a sea of storm ; it was the abiding place of the lady Constance ; anon, it might be the abiding-place of Matilda. “ Grant it Heaven !” aspirated the fond father ; “ whatever be my destiny here below, thy blessing light upon my innocent child !” and then he set spurs to horse, and when he passed the barrier, the still glories of evening were fast shadowing into grey. Cased as he was in steel, his face hid by his closed morion, and bearing a passport signed by the viscount de Thouars, he heeded not the busy throngs he every where encountered : he was in an hostile city, far removed from the influence of the king of England ; he feared neither the possibility of arrest or of recognition ; yet he doubted, whether to proceed direct to the castle, or, for the night, to claim shelter beneath some religious roof. As he stood pondering within himself how best to shape his actions, a gaunt-like figure,

figure,

gure, close muffled in a dark cloak, snatched at the bridle of his horse, and stepping close beside him, in a voice scarce higher than a whisper, said—"If thou art what thy garb bespeaks thee, a soldier, alight and follow me."

"Whither wouldst thou lead?" asked Walter, doubtful and wondering.

"Fear not," resumed the stranger, "but follow me."

"Fear," repeated Walter, and pride spurred to the venture; then springing from the stirrup, and casting the bridle o'er his arm—"Lead on," he pursued, "and I will follow, even to death."

The stranger spoke no more, but he passed swiftly through many narrow streets and turnings, and oftentimes he paused, and looked back, as if doubtful of his companion. The haze of twilight was fast deepening into the shades of night: earth and sky were alike enveloped: not a star shone in the heavens: heavy clouds gathered in the wind: the  
low

low moan of distant thunder at intervals broke upon the stillness, and Walter could scarce distinguish the giant form which stalked before him; yet boldly did he advance, nor did the guide pause, until they had reached a dark and lone building, shut in by thick walls.

"Here ends our toil," said the stranger. "Hast thou faith and courage to venture further?"

"Ay, even to death," again exclaimed Walter, and the next instant, passing through a low postern, he found himself within a kind of court-yard, close hemmed in, and overgrown with weeds and rubbish.

"Tarry until I stow the beast," said the man; and he took the bridle, and led to a shed, or stable, on the opposite side.

Walter glanced around; his heart was firm, his nerves strung to every vicissitude; yet he placed his hand upon the gift of De Hautefort, upon the hilt of  
that

that good sword, with which he still hoped to carve out fortune.—“ Be thou my stay,” he mused, “ whithersoever chance or capricious destiny may steer me.”

The building was large and heavy ; it was flanked with watchtowers, as though it had once been used as a fastness of strength ; but now it was fallen to decay, and inky blackness, and mouldering desolation, prevailed throughout.

“ The portal gates *had* fallen from their hinges ;  
 ———— the roof lack'd leading,  
 And docks and nettles in the court grew rank.”

A faint light streamed through a high loophole in the further tower: this doubtless was the spot to which he was bidden ; and it was a spot, so lone, and so fitted to deeds of evil, that suspicion grew as he tarried the return of the guide.

“ Another hour, and our doublets had been drenched,” said the man : “ the  
 rain

rain begins to patter, and the storm drifts fast. 'Tis a sorry shelter, sir knight, but 'tis better than earth and sky"—and then he led forward, and crossing to the main building, and threading many intricate passages, he ascended a spiral staircase.

Walter shadowed his very footsteps; for though dark, almost to stumbling, embarked as he was, in an adventure so mysterious, and so replete with peril, he resolved to court the issue. He was bold to the despite of life; his youth had been trained to war and warlike darings, and he felt his courage grow as the hazard seemed to thicken.

"Tarry," said the man, "until I cast light upon thy path."

Walter snatched at his cloak.—"Not so," he exclaimed: "we move together, whether in light or in darkness."

"On my soul," rejoined the stranger, "here lurketh no treachery, no foul play."

"Lead

“Lead on,” said Walter, firmly; “I have all to learn.”

On turning the last sharp angle, and mounting to the last step, a light, shining through the crevices, directed to an opposite door: the guide stepped forward, and the next instant, Walter followed into a low stone chamber. A lamp was burning on a marble slab, and a female was sitting beside it; and upon a couch, or pallet-bed, at the far end, lay stretched, an aged man, apparently struggling with mortal ailment. The noise of entrance disturbed the lady; she looked up, and the ray of light, falling askaunce her features, disclosed a face, white as moonshine, but of most exquisite beauty. She rose hastily, and throwing back her long dark tresses, advanced a few paces, then paused, and timidly pronounced, O’Carroll.”

“Ay, I am here, sweet saint,” said the stranger guide, “and my errand is accomplished !”

“A friend,”

"A friend," said the lady, and she burst into tears.

Walter stood root-bound, every vestige of suspicion dying away, and all his heart speaking in his eyes. Here was distress; here was calamity, perchance, great as had been his own; innocence too, and helplessness, like unto Matilda's: and as her tears, falling like dew upon the lily, heightened the interest of her rare loveliness, he mentally vowed to succour, even to the venture of life. The maiden spoke, and a wild tremour ran through his frame; he gazed upon her, and his every pulse quickened.

"Dreadful is the necessity," she faltered out, "which seeks for aid at stranger hands! here we are all strangers, sir knight, and the exigence of a dying father must sue for pardon."

"I can feel for what I have felt—misfortune," sighed Walter. "Try me, lady, to the utmost stretch of power;" and he bowed his head, and placed his hand

hand upon his breast.—“Belike I act unwittingly,” murmured the maid, “but my heart must plead the error of my judgment. Alas! in pressing a stranger into the service of misfortune, I have nought, save thanks, to offer.”

“There is a meed beyond ought of earthly thanks,” said Walter fervently. “Lady, no more. I would my powers were boundless as my will! Be brief, I pray you, and speak your wishes.”

The maiden raised her sunny eyes to the face of Walter, and that look, that angel face, opened anew the page of the past: it was grief, it was almost maddening tenderness, which rushed upon his heart, which swam in visions of ecstasy and torture; he staggered back; he pressed his hand to his forehead; and not until a low moan sounded from the bed, did he recover to the consciousness of where he was; he looked up, and he saw the sylph-like form bending o’er the couch, her hand, white as Parian marble, clasping



clasping the shrunken hand which lay upon the coverlet. She beckoned him towards her, and then she softly whispered—"Your wish is accomplished, my dear father: we are not quite alone—not quite destitute: compassion lives among men; and here is one, to minister to your comfort."

The sick man raised his head from the pillow; he looked long and wistfully at Walter, and then sinking back—"A soldier," he murmured, "and no priest."

"Would you that a priest be summoned?" asked the distressed girl.

"It had been better fitting," faltered the invalid. "A priest, to shrive the conscience of a dying man."

"Oh, say not so!" implored the maiden, and she wept in grief of heart.

"A priest, to pray for me, to absolve me," resumed the sufferer. "Knowest thou not, the thread of life is wellnigh spun?"

"We will pray for you," sobbed the mourner;

mourner; "and for absolution, my dear father, it cometh, through faith, in the promises of salvation. We are all bound down and chained in the gyves of sin: not of ourselves, but of the blessed Jesu, be our bonds lightened! My father, my dear father, would ye that a priest be sent for?" and she hung imploringly over him. A slight convulsion blackened the features of the aged man, and he groaned in the torture of the spirit. "What if O'Carroll hie to the nigh convent, and summon one of the brethren?" she importuned. "Speak but the wish, my father; he tarries to fly thy bidding."

O'Carroll, wrapped in the same dun cloak, strode to the bed's foot; he stood irresolute, his eyes bent upon the invalid; and though, so tall, so gaunt, and so ill-favoured for softness, big tears chased each other down his bronzed cheek.

"How fallacious is appearance! how erroneous all of human judgment!" mused

sed Walter, marking the scene before him. "A heart harbours in yon rough casket, soft as the heart of woman!" and a feeling, amounting to remorse, reproved his late suspicions.

"I will be back in the twinkling of an eye"—and O'Carroll struggled down his sobs.—"By the mass, and I would have brought a priest, but I judged a soldier better fitted to the office! God wot! the poor Margaret will lack a protector, when thy ear, my honoured master, is stopped with dust."

"Margaret," repeated Walter, and he gazed on the unconscious maid, with a feeling, more wild, and more agitated, than before.

The sick man again looked up, again looked steadfastly on Walter.—"A protector for the poor Margaret," he murmured—"thou hast judged wittingly, O'Carroll: a protector for the poor Margaret first—and next, a priest for my own need."

"Ay,

“ Ay, and I will seek one,” exclaimed O’Carroll ; “ and I will be fleet as the whirlwind ;” and as he spoke, he gathered up his cloak, and hurried from the chamber. But though in the faith of superstition, a priest was to still “ the worm that dies not”—was to quench “ the insatiate fire that ever burns”—the sick man could find no rest in the anticipated benison ; his thoughts were busy ; his spirit restless and perturbed ; he seemed to be wrestling with ills unseen, to be struggling beneath a heavy weight of bosomed evil. Sometimes, he would start erect, and wildly glance around ; then he would bury his face on the pillow, as though to shut out some grim and ghastly apparition ; then, with heavy groans, would he sink into stillness, or, with cries, heart-rending and terrific, petition grace and succour.

“ What bodes these fearful paroxysms ?” asked Walter.

Margaret could only weep.

“ Is

“ Is it fever, or is it some fatal secret, stinging unto death ? Is it——”

Margaret looked up, and Walter ceased, for again did bright but misty visions of paradise flit around him—visions of the past—visions of his days of happiness—visions, dim and shapeless, like distant land, gloaming amid the waves of ocean ; yet did they cozen him of his fortitude !—“ Forgive me, lady,” he faltered—“ I am scarce myself. There are similarities, there are resemblances, which acting on the mind, impart strange influence to the actions. Your form—your features ! Lady, you resemble one, enskied and sainted ; one, who gave bliss to my life ! Virgin Mother ! when I hear the name of Margaret—when I look upon the living, breathing Margaret, weeping for another’s woe, my own dead Margaret, lives again, breathes again, brings back hope and transport.”

“ Alas ! and must all who live, all  
who

who breathe, quaff of the bitter cup of human misery?" sighed the maid.

"You too have endured, sir knight, and another Margâret has drooped beneath the mildew of misfortune."

Walter dashed the tear from his cheek; his own feelings were inexplicable to him, for the honeyed accents of her tongue, fell, as sweet incense, on his heart; he took her hand; he whispered something of assurance and sympathy, and then he ceased, for a heavy groan issued from the bed, and the sick man, springing erect upon his elbow, gazed wildly around. The gloom seemed peopled with creatures of his own fancy; for whether it was fever, or whether it was remorse, horror and dismay lived in his eye.—"Is there no help?" he exclaimed.—"Is there no heart in this vast city of Angers to solace a dying man? Margaret—poor Margaret! I would make atonement—I would strive at something of expiation

—I would secure a shelter for thy wretchedness—I would give thee a home; child, when my home is the grave.”

“Dear, dear father, be composed, be calm, I pray you,” urged Margaret; “think not of me; the priest first;” and then she would have drawn Walter from the couch, but the sick man stretched forth his hand to stay him.

“I remember all,” he feebly said: “the knight who came at the call of O’Carroll. Go, leave us, Margaret. I have much to say, much to do, and time flits on rapid pinion. Time—time,” he pursued, and his every feature was convulsed: “blessed Jesu! would that I could bring back the years that are flown! worlds of wealth would too cheaply pay for one single hour. Go, Margaret—go, pray for me—pray for the signal grace of one hour: it importeth much to thee.” He watched her, as with soundless tread, she shrunk away from beside him; and when, by the lamp’s  
yellow

yellow ray, he saw her kneeling at the far end of the chamber, he again seized the hand of Walter.—“ A little nearer,” he implored—“ I crave thy ear—I crave thy compassion. I am a stranger, a foreigner: not of this country. I come from a far land; I——”

“ From friends and home,” feelingly interrupted Walter: “ alas! I can sympathize in every pang.”

“ More—more than sympathize,” importuned the dying man, and he held his hand in the clasp of anguish—“ I would crave protection—I would crave a home, for yon forlorn one.”

“ Your daughter?” asked Walter.

The stranger half raised himself, and dragging him down, so that his ear nearly touched his lip—“ She believes so,” he whispered.

“ Then she has not a daughter’s claim,” and Walter’s heart throbbed almost audibly.

“ It is a long story—a sad story,”



gasped out the invalid. "I have not breath—not life, to tell all. I am old, and worn out, and worthless; ay, and feeble, and death-stricken too. Stranger, I come from a far land—I once had friends, powerful friends: but when the ill-starred De Courson, the lord of Ratheny and Kilbarrock, basely fell, my sun set in clouds."

"Basely—didst thou say basely?" demanded Walter, and he clung to the side of the couch, for his knees tottered, and death-damps oozed from his forehead.

The sick man raised his sunken eyes; they rested on the nearly convulsed features of Walter, yet so wrapped was he in the hidden folds of his own woe, that he heeded not his agony.—"Alas! alas!" he faltered, "but for the fall of De Courson, I had not been here, Margaret had not been here. Stranger, the tale is wild and intricate. Revenge—revenge has been the blot upon my manhood—

manhood—I wrested the bolt of human destiny, and my victim fell. Ah! hearest thou not his groans? seest thou not his wan shade? He rides upon the whirlwind—he lives in the storm:—he came, as a conqueror, with fire and with sword; he ravaged the green fields of my native land, and I slew him in his hour of security. Avenging God! I thought it justice, retaliation; but I feel—I own it murder.”

Walter spoke not—his every sense felt converged in the sense of hearing: strangely was he implicated in the destiny of the mysterious being before him:—and he saw the grave opening, and that mysterious being, dropping, sinking into its oblivious fold, with the tale half told, with the fearful link tightened, with the strange concatenation unexplained.

“Wilt thou aid me?—wilt thou succour me in my uttermost need?” wildly implored the aged man—“wilt thou

pluck away the thorn, which goads so sharp and stinging? For the love of Christ—for the love of thy own soul—for the love of mercy, wilt thou protect the orphan Margaret?"

"Speak on! speak on!" urged Walter, scarce conscious of what he uttered.

"Wilt thou be her father?—wilt thou be her friend?—wilt thou steer her through this world of peril? Be brief: tell me, wilt thou accept the trust? or must I die unassured?"

He paused, but Walter could not answer; his own powers seemed paralyzed—his heart's pulsation felt to stop: wildly he gazed upon the stricken being before him, as though his own life hung upon the frail thread so nearly severed.

"Air—give me air," gasped out the dying man—"I lack breath—I lack strength. Oh, for air!" and he half threw himself from the couch, and grasped tight at the arm of Walter: then, looking up into his face—"Is there  
there

there a hell keener than the hell of conscience?" he asked. "How dare I picture heaven, when thou, even thou, a worm, an atom, like unto myself, withholds the boon of comfort?"

"Not so," said Walter, struggling down the load within: "too well do I feel my own insufficiency, to withhold the boon I myself covet. Mercy—Heaven's mercy on us both! Explain, tell me of the orphan Margaret? already does my heart yearn to her, as to the child of my own love."

The stranger laboured for words: again he tried to raise himself, but he fell back on the pillow; a heavy convulsion blackened his features—it seemed as the inward workings of remorse and anguish; and when the power of speech did return, his articulation was sunk and broken.—"The hand of misery weighs me down;—the power, not the will, is wanting. Pray for me, stranger—pray for us: I, the injurer—

she, the injured." He ceased—he lay listless and still; then, with a heavy effort, every nerve stretched, and every power exerted—"In the county of Louth, near the town of Drogheda, in the abbey of Mellifont, ask for the monk Dennis. He holds the confession of Symmachus O'Chahargy."

Wild, piercing, was the cry which burst from the lips of Walter.—"A murderer! dipped, dyed in blood!" he ejaculated, and he staggered back, and he fell upon the floor, stiff and wan, as statuary marble:—and when he did rally to consciousness—when breaking from the feeble hold of the terrified Margaret, he tottered back to the side of the couch, the ear was closed, the eye was dim, and a clod of breathless clay alone lay stretched before him.

## CHAPTER VII.

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“Hypocrisy ! thou double-crested snake !  
Invisible to all of mortal eye,  
Thou singlest out thy victims ; and on their  
Bane, erects thy triumph.”

FOR many hours, surrounded by an armed retinue, Matilda journeyed onwards, scarcely conscious of the motion, and wrapt in the bewilderment of conjecture and surprise; visions of bliss hovering around; anticipations, wild and shapeless, fanning every dream of fancy. Sometimes the friar would move at her side ; sometimes, he would seek to lure her into converse : but oftener would she shrink away from his searching eye : for though he still carefully shrouded his features in his dark hood, there was a something in his gaze, which ever filled her with inquietude and restlessness. It was not fear,

it was not distrust ; but it was a sensation of pain, a sensation of self-reproach ; for till now, she had wont to feel at peace with all of Heaven's servants, she had lived in amity and trust with all within the narrow limit of her intercourse.—“ Strange,” she mused ; “ so gentle, so anxious to oblige, so studious of my comfort ; the chosen messenger too of my dear father, and still would I fly from his kindness, would I hide myself from his assiduities, as though his services were intrusive.”

Diligently did she strive to keep strict guard upon her looks and her actions ; she remembered, that prejudice, like an unruly horse, owned no check-rein : that trampling on all that was estimable and just, it eboked up every genuine spring of heart and feeling : and when they occasionally tarried for rest or refreshment, she would suffer him to assist her from the litter, nor did she decline the support of his arm, when urged to

to

to visit some wild variety of scenery, she would wander from the beaten track. His observations and his sentiments coincided not with her ideas of the priestly calling: she listened to his dissertations upon the romantic and the sublime, and often did she marvel at the subtlety of his reasoning and the fire of his language. Tending but to one point, the sway of seductive feeling o'er the heart, he would ever veer by the most subtle labyrinths, portraying passion as a venal trespass, and love as the master-spring of human action: and then he would exemplify in such wild and witching sallies, he would lure midst such flower-bespangled paths, he would linger over selected proofs which his experience had elicited, that Matilda would imperceptibly yield her attention and her interest, wondering, and almost weeping, when unrequited love was the theme. Sometimes he would call upon her judg-



ment; sometimes upon her principles; but oftener upon her heart.

"Tell me, madam," he asked, "if love hurried into rashness, would you—could you pardon the culprit?—if led by impulse, rather than by policy, would you—could you forget the action in the motive?"

"Love will ever palliate," said Matilda, timidly, "and soften where it cannot fail to blame."

"But could you, in return, love the culprit? If error arose in the stimulant of your own matchless perfections, could you forgive—could you forget the trespass?"

Matilda blushed: it was the image of the unknown palmer which glowed on memory, yet she stifled down the sigh which swelled her bosom.—"This is an inquisition," she exclaimed, "which I know not how to answer. Circumstances, father, can best model human actions."

"Circum-

“Circumstances are often as a blast upon human probity,” quick rejoined the wily stranger. “Excuse me, maiden, from thy father I have learned, that thou art sanguine, enthusiastic, confiding : young, and rarely lovely, I see thou art ; and I know thou art about entering a world, full of illusion, and full of subtlety. I would but probe the strength of thy principles, and learn the point most vulnerable to attack. By aid of a long life of labour and of experience, I would rend away the dazzling haze, which ever gathers before the eyes of thoughtless youth ;—I would despoil the snake of his speckled skin ; I——” He ceased, for at the instant, a bramble-bush, clinging to his serge cloak, tore it suddenly back : the incident was in itself trivial, but the quick eye of Matilda caught the bright polish of steel, and doubt and wonder gathered. “Marvel not,” pursued the wily friar, studiously perusing each fluctuation of countenance—

nance—"zeal, ere now, has buckled the sword upon the snow-white alb, for in one simultaneous rush, did the clergy and ~~the~~ laity, gather on the shores of Palestine. There, was the soldier grafted on the priest; there——"

"But we are not in Palestine," interrupted Matilda, "neither are we in a land open to infidel hate."

"True, maiden; but we are in a land, torn by hate, wellnigh as deadly; in a land, sacked and ravaged by party-malice and civil contention. Knowest thou not, England yields not her sovereignty here unmarked with blood;—that Philip Augustus, strengthened by the sentence of his assembled peers——"

"I know," again interrupted Matilda, "that the white monks of Cisteaux fight but with the weapons of faith and zeal; that the priesthood, severed and cleansed from the fitful passions of the world, wield but the pastoral staff of charity and conciliation."

The

The friar mused for many moments, and then he breathed a groan, as of a troubled spirit.—“ Jesu Maria !” he ejaculated, “ how has infidelity crept into thy fold, and subverted this thy firstling ! I have fought for the true faith—I have bled for the true faith ; but never, until now, has my heart bled for the apostacy, of one, so young, and so trained to worship and to holiness.”

“ Apostacy !” repeated Matilda — “ Alas ! father, how have I incurred a charge so monstrous ?”

“ Ask thy own heart—probe thy own heart,” quick rejoined the friar ; “ weed away all its fallacies, and all its speculations. ’ Damsel, what save an incipient knowledge of evil, can frame the suspicions now lurking in thy mind ? If thou knowest nought of ill, how canst thou attribute ill to one of Heaven’s servants ?”

Matilda trembled—her feelings were in arms—her heart smote her.—“ If I  
have

have injured thee," she murmured, "may Heaven deal with me according to my offence!" and then she raised her eyes to her reprover, but she read that in the eye which encountered hers, which again filled her pure mind with doubt and apprehension: she shrunk back; she stood irresolute; her face half bent, and the glossy ringlets of her raven hair, shadowing her burning cheeks. The friar pressed beside her; he bent over her; he breathed the words of assurance and pardon; yet his manner was perturbed, his accent strangely broken.

"I would we had reached our destined home!" said Matilda, timidly, and then she tried to advance, but the friar held her arm.

"What dost thou fear?" he asked.

"Fear," echoed the maid—"alas! I know not." And she glanced around, but that glance chased not her fears, for fast closing day gleamed on a spot, lone, and wild, and desolate; a spot, shut out  
from

from all of human intercourse, hemmed in with lofty hills, and fringed with darkened forests. Long had the sun set beneath a canopy of clouds; for though, here and there, flickering tints of gold and purple still lingered, the heavens wore the portentous livery of storm. Her heart throbbed high; her pulses quickened; her cheeks, from crimson, faded to snow; she searched eagerly, anxiously, for the litter, for the well armed retinue, as though security lay in numbers: but she searched in vain; she encountered nought, save those lofty hills, those darkening forests, and that sky of storm. "Virgin mother!" she aspired, and then she tried to rally all her fortitude, for the friar scoffed at her terrors.

"In one brief moment," he exclaimed, pointing to the signal-bugle, "we can be surrounded by a host: the men at arms await but our bidding: the litter, hid by yon knoll of verdure, like unto a  
fairy

fairy couch, tarries but to lure thee to repose. Fearest thou me, because I bear a sword? In thy cause, maiden, shall it fly its scabbard: ay, to serve thee, will I fight, as when I fought in the land of promise; when bearding the imperial Saladin, we tore away the hated crescent, and planted the blessed cross on the walls of Joppa!"

"Of Joppa!" repeated Matilda, losing at once, all of local fear, in newly excited interest."

"Led by the lion of England! the glorious, the magnanimous Richard!" pursued the friar, "we fought, manfully fought, for the delivery of the holy places—for the rescue of the true cross—for the redemption of the blessed sepulchre of Christ:—and not one soul in the vast conjunction, sprinkled in infidel blood, which in the dark struggle, winged not its flight from earth to paradise; not one soul, touched, tranced in zeal, who felt not life too poor an offering!"

He

He paused, but Matilda spoke not ; she bosomed all the enthusiasm of that age of enthusiasm ; she had heard of the first crusaders, of the trials, and the martyrdom of those, who had bled for the true faith ; and she gazed upon the militant priest, who had tracked the footsteps of the pious and the magnanimous Godfrey of Bouillon, with a feeling of reverence and wonder.

“ Why marvellest thou, fair one ? ” resumed the friar, joying in the interest he elicited. “ Thinkest thou, when on holy Friday, at three in the afternoon, the very day, and the very hour of the Passion, Godfrey of Bouillon stood a conqueror on the walls of Jerusalem—thinkest thou, he had greater cause for exultation and for gratitude than I ? ”

“ We have all cause for gratitude, but nought, I trow, for exultation, when we ponder on our own littleness,” meekly remarked Matilda.

“ For both—ay, for both ! ” emphatically



cally pronounced the friar—" I feel gratitude, and I feel exultation, *now* ;—perchance thou mayest feel them hereafter."

" It may be so," said Matilda, and then she motioned to advance, for the deepening gloom of the heavens, augured more than the approach of night. The rain already pattered, and the hollow din of distant thunder broke in prolengthened echoes.

" I will cover thee with my own garment—I will shelter thee with my own life!" whispered the friar, pressing close beside her, and tracing in her wan cheek the evidence of terror. " Matilda, loveliest of created beings! be my bosom thy pillow—be the intricate folds of my heart, thy sure sanctuary! Nay, list to me, lady"—for doubt and reproof spoke in the lightning glance of her eye—" my life is an enigma; and the gratitude, and the exultation of my life, depend on thee."

" On me!" exclaimed the wondering girl—

girl — “ explain, for thy words are strangely ambiguous.”

“ Lurketh there no solution to the riddle ?” asked the wily stranger — “ may not the consciousness of human excellence resolve the seeming ambiguity ? This chequered pass to eternity teems with shoals and quicksands, with baits to allure, and temptations to subvert, all of human will. Maiden, hast thou no pity for one, who struggles, and struggles in vain ? — who would fain pluck away the evil, but who feels the futility of the effort ?”

“ Alack ! I know not what thou wouldst have of me,” faltered Matilda.

“ I would have gentleness, consideration, pity — angel pity,” quick replied the friar — “ I would have trust, and faith, and forgiveness, for every past and present trespass.” He ceased, but Matilda uttered not a sound ; strange and terrifying conjectures crowded on each other ; her mind was bewildered, her spirits oppressed :

pressed : what could be the trespass, and wherefore could her pity, wherefore could her forgiveness, be so urgently sought ? The friar took her hand—" It is thou alone," he exclaimed, " who hast driven me to disguise and mystery ; thou alone, who hast lured me out of the straight track of moderation and conformity. I am not what I appear : this cloak, and this priest's hood, veils a form, young in years ; a heart, venturous in project. No cold fanatic vow, rises an ice-bar betwixt us ; no ban of the church, frowns annihilation to my wishes. I came, a palmer, to the convent of the white monks of Cisteaux—I saw the daughter of the gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux, and that moment sealed my destiny. Lady, recall the chapel—recall the wood : look on me well." As he spoke, he cast back the cowl, and Matilda, shrieking, fell fainting on his arm ; for she recognised the bold stranger, who, on the banks of the Gartampe, almost within

within the shadow of her own home, like an evil genius, had so uncourteously crossed her pathway.

## CHAPTER VIII.

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" ———— Gift me with vengeance, Heaven !  
That I may pour upon his traitor head,  
The dire reprisal of his own foul deeds ;  
That I may hurl into his dastard ear,  
This—this, the gleaming of blood-guiltiness !"

THE return of O'Carroll, and the exordiums of the attending monk, allayed not the tumult in the breast of Walter : despair and horror seemed to ice every faculty : he stood by the side of the couch, gazing on the dead man ; sometimes, his lips moving in prayer, but oftener, closing his eyes in utter dismay. Worlds would he have given, to have called back the dislodged spirit, to have  
shed

shed light on the strange mystery which every way thickened. The monk of Mellifont Abbey offered solution : but Ireland, that loved, that coveted home of his heart's rest, was the one spot, lost, and shut out to him for ever : he dared not land upon her seagirt shores ; he dared not brave the iron rule of John of England : the threat of ignominious death awaited him in the land of his nativity :—for though the prowess of his ancestors had aided in setting “the emerald gem in the crown of a stranger”—that sovereign stranger barred him the enjoyment of one rood of earth—exiled him in want and woe—set a price upon his head, and doomed him to all the bitter ills of penury.

“ Ingratitude ! ingratitude ! ” ejaculated Walter, writhing in the torture of remembrance, “ thou bane, thou mildew upon all of earthly promise ! thou scourge, thou ravening fiend upon all the hopes of man ! Yet can we not ‘ gather grapes  
of

of thorns, or figs of thistles," he pursued, after a pause of deep thought: "no, no, no; nor from a graceless son, from a disloyal brother, from a cruel traitorous uncle, can we gather gratitude."

"What meanest thou, my son?" reproachfully demanded the monk. "This our brother, sleepeth in the hope of an atoning Saviour; profane not then his ashes." As he spoke, he placed a crucifix on the breast of the dead man, and he drew a sheet o'er his marbled features. Margaret sobbed aloud; she was on her knees at the side of the couch; she looked up for a moment, and then again she dropped her head, as if in prayer.

The night waned in storm and grief; for the sighs of Margaret, and the heavy moans of O'Carroll, and the low requiem of the spiritual father, mingled with the howling wind, and the louder growl of the thunder: the lightning too outglared the sickly lamp; for oft did its lurid flame, as if in mockery, flash, and play

play o'er this scene of desolation. . It was a night of wakeful watching—a night suited to sad fancies—a night, for contemplation, wellnigh to madness: but to note the wild wanderings of Walter's fevered brain, would be to anticipate our pages.—He passed that long and dreary night, as a man may be supposed to do, who possessing more of milk than gall in his nature, watches at the side of a fallen foe;—he passed it in zealous earnest prayer, even for one he had accused of murder;—he passed it in analyzing his own fitful feelings, in probing every impulse of his past actions, in scourging the manifold trespasses of the inward man, in meek humility, in pious adoration:—and when the low plaints of Margaret called him from himself; when his eyes and his thoughts rested on the bier of death—“He needeth all that the living can accord,” mused his own erring heart—“In heaven, boundless is the  
promised

promised mercy ! on earth, be it the perfect to cast the stone !"

With the morning's dawn the monk returned to his convent, and Walter, reviving to the necessity of exertion, and the duties of earth, rallied from the morbid trance of deep and sorrowing reflection. In this fresh trial, chance had strangely involved him in a new and arduous task. A creature, young and beautiful, as the fabled houries of Mahomet's paradise, destitute and portionless, was cast upon his honour and protection ; at a time too, when necessity impelled him to seek at stranger hands, a home for his own loved Matilda.

" I will plead for both," he mused, gazing on the unconscious mourner. " Be the heart but capacious, and the means are adequate. But alas ! should strange scruples, should worldly doubts, resist all my pleadings." Walter shuddered at the bare possibility. He longed to question of the past, but it was not



his nature to open anew the wounds of memory ; yet how to the ear of the royal Constance name this daughter of affliction, without first investigating all which could shed light upon the mystery, the effects of the dead man, and the circumstances which had anteceded their arrival at Angers. His eye fell upon O'Carroll, and he beckoned him towards him, and leading him from the chamber, for more than an hour, did he listen to an ill-told tale, ending, as it began, in doubt and confusion, and garnished, plentifully, with digressions of native feeling and instinctive simplicity.

O'Carroll loved his master, and adhered to his master, through all the gusts and storms of adverse fortune : he had fled with him from Ireland ; he had wandered with him over the face of the land ; he had tended him in sickness, and shared with him, every difficulty, and every hardship : he had never heard of a wife ; yet in Normandy, near the  
little

little town of Carentan, at the grate of the Ursuline nuns, had he often visited the reputed daughter of his master. From early infancy she had been a boarder in the convent, and scarce six weeks had elapsed, since she had been claimed at the hands of the lady abbess. From that period, little other than misfortune had arisen; the mildew of disease had fallen on the ill-starred O'Chahargy; he had been visited by sickness—he had been assailed by robbers—he had been stripped of his worldly wealth: and when at Angers, sanguine and confiding, he sought the haven of friendship, he found the dwelling empty, his friend beneath the sword, and the pictured asylum of his desolate Margaret, almost roofless, little other than bare walls. This was as the last blow to his spirit and his exertion: in that forlorn dwelling, scarce sheltered from the blast of heaven, he sought a temporary resting-place; there did he droop his listless head;

head; and there, supported by Margaret, and the ever-faithful O'Carroll, did he await the approach of the grim king of terrors. His mind, long stretched, fell back upon itself; the past yielded no panacea; the future was involved in gloom; fever and delirium succeeded; each paroxysm grew stronger, and each lapse from the wildness of frenzy, more like the stilly calm of death.

Such had been the mortal extremity, which had driven O'Carroll from the tower, which had speeded him on the wings of the wind, to seek some good Samaritan, who might minister to the needy, and pour oil and wine into the bleeding wounds of the afflicted. Chance, or rather, impelling destiny, had led to the presence of Walter—at a moment too, when irresolute and doubtful how to shape his actions, bridling in his horse, he had wooed, as it should seem, the salutation of O'Carroll:—and O'Carroll, in the sanguine hope of a protector for the  
helpless

helpless and the destitute orphan of his dying master, had fearlessly snatched at the reins, and pressed a stranger into the service of humanity.

Such was the sense which Walter gathered from the garrulous and disjointed recital of O'Carroll; but all his anxiety, and all his eager questions, could shed no light on the mystery involving the hapless Margaret. O'Carroll spoke of her as of a being too good for earth; so gentle, so patient, so uncomplaining, so full of the milk of human kindness, so prone to all that the heart covets in woman!

"And withal, so beautiful too!" said, or rather sobbed, the honest Hibernian. "By the mass! and I would dig for her, and beg for her, ay, and steal for her too, would it not tempt a frown."

Walter stood, thoughtful and absent, his arms folded, and his mind and feelings occupied by the desperate fortunes of his new charge. O'Carroll drew close

beside him ; eagerly did he watch each feature, as though to decipher therein the future hopes of Margaret ; and when he saw sadness and gloom lower on the brow of Walter, his own spirit fell, his own heart sickened.

“ Well, well,” he ejaculated, “ I will hie thee back to the nunnery at Carentan : thou must become the spouse of God, my blessed lady, for thou art too good for man !”

“ It may chance so,” observed Walter, mournfully ; “ but be it the last resource ; be it, when all of earth fails.”

O'Carroll's features brightened.—“ Holy St. Patrick !” he exclaimed, “ rather would I shave my own crown, and turn monk !” Then, with all the eager warmth of honest truth—“ Wilt thou be a father to the dear lady ? Wilt thou be a master to me ?”

“ I am a soldier of fortune,” replied Walter, “ and my trust is the sword. Alack ! my honest friend, in my service,  
thou

thou canst reap nought, save peril, and the chance of a broken head."

"Marry! and I may give as good as I may take," said O'Carroll, drily. Then, with a heavy sigh—"I cannot serve my dead master beyond bearing him to his bed of earth:—and when in his bed of earth, how can I better prove the strength of affection, than by serving the friend of the good sweet Margaret! Ay, sir knight"—and the fervour of his heart glowed in every rough feature—"take me, Conner O'Carroll, into thine own honourable service; and by St. Patrick and the Holy Trinity, I will stick to thee, and fight beside thee, right or wrong!"

Such was the short and energetic compact, which "grappled with hooks of steel," O'Carroll to the fortunes of a stranger master, embarking him in all the hazards of fitful destiny, and launching him, body and spirit, into the heat and acrimony of party feeling! And such, full often, is the bond which leagues

unto death ; for swayed by impulse, and premature decision, the judgment slumbers, when the passions alone are wakeful !

Walter was a visionary, and like other visionaries, he believed all that his heart wished ; yet without hinting to Margaret the errand upon which he adventured, he left her and O'Carroll to watch and to pray at the side of the departed O'Chahargy, and mounting his horse, soon traced back the road he had taken the preceding night : but unlike the preceding night, the road was now dappled with sunshine, and the verdure of the trees and hedges, more fresh and bright from the past tempest. Impressive was the contrast : nature, so lately wrapped in gloom, in silence, and in dread, now smiled beneath the fresh and balmy breeze ; the birds carolled in mid-air, and universal was the show of gladness.

" Ah ! how different, the tempest,  
which

which last-night broke upon yon ruined tower!" mused Walter, his thoughts flying back to the bier watered by the tears of Margaret. "What though the tempest bends the fairest flowers of the field, returning sunshine rallies them into life and freshness! 'Tis man, who sinks and fades away, and rallies no more; man dies, and not a thousand suns can restore his vigour: yet he dies to live; he runs the race of woe and death; he passes through a tear-steeped pilgrimage, and his soul, his immortal soul, triumphant wings to heaven!"

The noise and bustle of a populous city roused Walter from his moody trance; he looked up; he saw busy speculating crowds traversing the streets: and mingling with those crowds, he heard that war saturated the earth with human blood;—that the minds of men were still filled with horror at the murder of the duke of Britany;—that John of England was detested and despised,



his treasons and his cruelties weakening the ties of allegiance, and gradually dissolving the links which ought inseparably to unite the king and the subject; that the simultaneous rush called for revenge;—that the Bretons, in despair of recovering the princess Eleanor, sister of the ill-fated Arthur, from the power of her unnatural uncle, who held her in close captivity in England, had chosen Alice, the daughter of the royal Constantia, by her second marriage with Guy de Thouars, for their sovereign: and that that nobleman, intrusted with the government of the duchy, had borne their complaint to the feet of his liege lord Philip Augustus; and now, aided by Philip Augustus, was dealing woful reprisal, in the sacking and dismantling such towns and cities as still adhered to the side of England:—that Philip Augustus, heading his warlike legions, and aiming at the total expulsion of the English from France, heedless of every stand which

which hardihood dare make against him, had overrun the provinces, and still joined by the flower of his nobles, was pursuing the rapid current of his fortune.

Such was the outline Walter gathered in his pass to the castle; and as he toiled up the steep rock upon which it bulged, hope, like the phoenix, sprung anew from its own ashes. He forgot his woes and his trials in the new era opening to his fortunes: sanguine, as in the first bloom of his summer, and building on the loud and general execrations heaped on the perfidious John, he saw himself striding over a prostrate foe, and rending from the gripe of rapacity and injustice, his own prized and unblench- ed honours; he saw himself restored to the rank he was born to fill, and his own loved Matilda—no longer, like the lily in the desert, wasting unseen her sweetness and her beauty—offering a home and an asylum to the destitute Margaret.

The

The bright and beamy smile, burnishing each feature, and as a halo glowing and playing around his brow, still imparted eloquence to hope and bliss to expression, as ushered by the written passport of the viscount De Thouars, he stood before the mother of the murdered prince Arthur: but when he gazed on her care-worn cheek, and her sable habit; when he traced grief, and indignation, and rankling hate, struggling for mastery; when he beheld, sporting at her feet, the young Alice, the chosen heiress of that rich duchy, lovely in innocence and infancy—that bright and beamy smile vanished, and hate of the usurper John, burnt anew in every vein. She arose, and she met him, as a declared follower of her party, and an avenger of her son; and when she spoke of that son, of that flower of her hopes, nipped in the springtide of promise, her grief and her indignation redoubled. Bitter and heavy was the curse she imprecated:

precated : it was not the calm wo of a Christian, bruised, and bleeding under persecution and outrage ; it was the rancour of a galled and irritated heart which lived in her eye.—“ Be his torments, like unto my torments !” she ejaculated —“ be his despair remediless ! be his death, the slow poison of remorse ! be the image of my murdered boy, the festering thorn, to goad him to the grave’s brink, to hurl him headlong into the hell he merits !”

“ Like you, lady,” exclaimed Walter, “ I call for vengeance on the king of England ; like you, I smart beneath the injustice of the king of England ; and like you, will I pursue the king of England, to the utmost verge of earth. He has despoiled you of your son ; he has despoiled me of my honest fame : whether of the twain has the most cause to curse him ?”

“ Warrior”—and the countess spoke with point and feeling—“ we all know the  
the

the weight of our own burdens. My wrongs are, as the stars, countless: a son murdered—a daughter captive—an inheritance usurped: and all, all, at the hands of *a husband's brother*; at the hands of the man, who ought to have sheltered us from the tempest—the man, linked to us by blood and nature! Holy God! and he builds churches, and he attends mass, and he buckles on the cross, and espouses the wars of Christendom! A hypocrite! a blasphemer! a violator of all which is just and holy! Marvel not”—and she drew close beside him—“that there are seasons, when my brain is wellnigh maddened. But I cry your pardon: this is little to the purport;” and quick she recovered all her self-command, and all her native majesty—“I would speak of the present, not the past: of the existing state of things, of our hope of conquest:” and she minutely narrated all that Walter had gathered from public rumour, and invited him, without

without the delay of a single hour, to repair to the camp at Loches, and enrol himself beneath the banner of the federate nobles.

But as yet the errand of Walter was not half accomplished: he saw in the duchess Constantia—not what he had pictured, the tender, weeping, sensitive woman; but one replete with almost masculine courage; and he doubted whether to reveal the secret of his name and birth, or to consign Matilda to her care and guardianship, more as a pledge for his fealty, than as a dependant upon her benevolence.

Whilst yet he stood irresolute, the fire of heroism again kindled up her striking features.—“In all and every quarter, God prospers our just cause!” she exclaimed. “In Normandy, Falaise, Constance, and Bayeux, have yielded to the arms of Philip Augustus! Hugh le Brun, earl of Marche, has reduced the provinces of Maine and Touraine;

raine ; and the whole of Poitou now lays at the feet of Henry Clement, marshal of France ! My boy will be avenged ! the saints be praised, my boy will be avenged ! The worm which dies not, the fire which cannot be quenched, will be the portion of the usurper John !”

“ And what further, lady,” demanded Walter, “ when the domination of England be expelled France ?”

A cloud of care shrouded the brow of the royal Constantia.—“ Alack !” she sighed, “ much remains to be done ere the dawn of that joyous day. Because, for whole centuries, Normandy has been subjected to the yoke of England, still, with strange perversity, Verneuil, Arques, and Rouen, maintain their sworn allegiance, and force, force alone, must expel the British lion from their towers.”

“ Can habit, can long custom, strive against right and justice ?” asked Walter : “ can Normans forget, that the  
mere

mere cession of Charles the Simple, to the first duke Rollo, severed them from the crown of France? Lady, if such be their perverse adhesion, might must enforce when policy fails."

"And more blood must be shed," mournfully concluded the duchess; "more human victims must be immolated."

Walter shuddered: he thought of Rouen, of the dark tower o'ertopping the Seine; he thought of the royal lamb which had there bled beneath the sacrificing knife of ambition and cruelty, and his own heart's blood curdled, as he gazed upon the despoiled mother of that outraged son.—"What is the blood which may be shed to the blood which *has* been shed?" he exclaimed; and then he ceased, for he saw every vestige of colour fly the lips and cheeks of the duchess; a universal trembling seized her, and again the big tear stood in her eye.

"True—



“ True—true,” she murmured—“ my son ! my murdered Arthur !” Then starting into all her energetic strength of character—“ Those who adhere to the tyrant, must fall with the tyrant,” she pronounced ; “ those who cling to the rotten staff of his promises, must with him be overwhelmed in the coming tempest. Mark me, warrior : not the salt sea can hem in the legions of Philip Augustus. What, though we sack him in his capital, and bury him in the ruins of his usurped realm.”

Walter did mark her, and he read more than the lips uttered ; yet he dared not question ; he dared not ask solution : it might be some floating vision of her own conjuring ; or it might be some deep and subtle enterprise, which fancy scarce could body.

“ Tarry,” she pursued, lowering her voice to a whisper, “ until Anjou be added to our list of conquests, and time will expound the rest.” Then, referring  
to

to the vellum, written by the viscount De Thouars—"Our brother speaks of a boon, and savours it as a benefice to himself. Be brief, sir knight, for fain would we outstrip his wishes."

"The sole benefice to himself, lady," said Walter, eagerly, "arises in the consciousness of a generous action, and the firm bond which binds me for life his debtor." And then he spoke of his absent Matilda, of his anxiety for her safety, and his fervent wish to place her in honourable protection ere he braved the perils of war.

"Be wife, or child, or children, all our especial care," resumed the duchess. "Fight you our battles, sir knight"—and beamy was her smile of graciousness—"and be our home-shelter theirs."

The cloud of deep grief which momentarily saddened the features of Walter, was like the mellowing clouds of autumn scudding on the sunbeam, for it vanished almost in the birth.—"Two, lady,"

lady," he replied, espousing at once the fortunes of the orphan Margaret: "one, mine by nature; the other, mine by sacred promise."

"Both mine by *sacred promise*," emphatically repeated the duchess. "Bear them hither, warrior, and on the pledged word of majesty, be their safety, precious, as the safety of my innocent Alice."

Walter, impulsive and ardent, bowed his knee, as, almost in homage, his lips touched the hand extended; and ere he arose, he mentally bosomed the vow, to graft on his own, the wrongs of prince Arthur, and unto death, to sustain the cause of vengeance.

The last sad offices vouchsafed at Christian hands to those who depart in the faith, was duly and charitably accorded: the monks of St. Julian bore the corse of O'Chahargy to their own burial-ground; and Walter, forgetful of the deeds, which in life, had stamped  
eternal

eternal enmity between them, moved in the procession, and saw the cold clay deposited in the rest for all living. It needed not the impressive homily of the officiating priest to enforce the nothingness of sublunary hope and sublunary dependance : alas ! his own experience taught him the emptiness of this world : taught him the shallow trust to be placed upon rank and upon riches : and he wondered, when he saw the coffin lowering from mortal eye—when he heard the loud sobs of the mourning O'Carroll—how the illusions of sense could warp the judgment or mislead the heart ; wondered, how man, preeminently endowed with reason and with reflection, could hunt after shadow, and grasp at the meteor-flame of false beguiling pleasure. But the awful truths of eternity, the flitting wing of all-consuming time, the vapoury base of ought appertaining to flesh, strikes home to every man's bosom, when beholding,  
like

like Walter, earth returned to its native earth ! It is a lesson, to relax the firmest sinew of the stoutest heart, to make us exclaim, in the words of Plato—“ The wise man’s life ” should be “ the meditation of death : ”—and he returned to the desolate tower, he re-sought the presence of the mourning Margaret, with every harsh feeling chastened, and every bosomed injury forgiven : nay, he joined in her prayer for the repose of the dislodged spirit : and as he supplicated grace on his own trespasses, so did he yield grace to the trespasses of a buried foe.

But brief was the season given to inaction : dear and pressing claims called upon the exertion of Walter ; and the same hour which consigned the portionless Margaret to the care of the duchess Constantia, saw him, attended by O’Carroll, on the road to that humble home which had sheltered him in his heaviest fortune.

Gradually

Gradually did his bruised and drooping spirit regain all its elasticity and all its vigour: the death-scene of O'Chahargy, and the narrow mound of earth searing up his mortal relics, yielded to the anticipation of conquest, to the bright hopes of renown, to the craving thirst for enterprise and for preeminence. Panting for action, zealous to eke out fame and glory, to pluck the blood-steeped laurel, and wear it in the gaze of thousands, his warrior-heart, scoffing at fatigue or hazard, speeded him on the journey; and not until his eager eyes first caught sight of the Gartampe, smoothly gliding within its green and sedgy borders, did nature rise superior to every other feeling. Then, he pictured Matilda, wearing the lagging hours in anxiety and sorrow, praying for his safety, watching for his return; then, did every idea yield to the stealing softness of the parent; then, through the haze of distance, did ima-

gination conjure the outline of his late haunts: and long before that outline grew perceptible, did he see, or fancy he saw, the grey spires of St. Mary's monastery, and the tall trees skirting the scene of his daily toil: and quick followed, the rose-embosomed home of his rest, shining, as a brightened speck, and beckoning to exertion. His heart throbbed high; his eyes swam in sensibility and thankfulness; he had procured an honourable asylum for the child of his love; beamy visions of prosperity dappled his own late sombre path; and though, like rainbow tints, his hopes were unreal, unstable, still, they gave spur to energy, and renovation to fatigue.

"See you yon darkening towers?" he asked, reining in his horse, and calling upon the attention of his thoughtful follower.

"I see nought, save earth and sky," said O'Carroll.

"Not

“Not a river?” demanded Walter—  
“not trees and towers in the distance?”

“Ay, I see a river,” replied O’Carroll: “not so clear, and so bright, though, as our own dear Shannon. But I see nought beside.”

Walter sighed heavily.—“It may be the deception of vision,” he murmured, and again he speeded forward.

“They talk of their vines and their fig-trees,” observed O’Carroll, encouraged to conversation by the late advance of Walter. “God wot! I love our shamrock better than all their lilies: and for country—by the mass! I would not yield one of our own bogs for all their pastures. I love a bog: it chequers the face of things; and like wet weather, makes us better enjoy the sunshine.”

“It may be so,” said Walter, thoughtfully. “The rough adds savour to the sweet. If all in this life was smooth and even, man——”



"It is so, your honour," energetically interrupted O'Carroll. "If Ireland was all bog, it would be fairer to my eyes, and dearer to my heart, than the green fields of France!"

"And yet, voluntarily, and unreluctantly, you exchanged Ireland for France," rejoined Walter.

"Arrah now! and can you believe so? No, no; many a salt tear have I shed, and many a sigh have I blown back, to my own mud hovel, and my pretty Norah. I left it, your honour, when Ireland was too hot to hold my poor buried master: and how could I desert my poor buried master, when all the world ran cross! I had eaten of his bread, and drank of his cup—I had shared his sunshine:—and if, like summer flies, I had scudded before the shower, by St. Patrick, and I had not deserved the hempen cord, which had slung me out of life!"

"You are an honest fellow, O'Carroll,  
and

and I venerate your principles. Perchance the season may yet dawn, when Ireland will smile a welcome."

" Ah, if I could only think so !" and joy illumined every feature—" if I could only know myself once more safe in my own blessed county of Meath, the devil himself should no more catch me tripping."

" Of Meath—did you say of Meath?" and Walter's voice was low and tremulous.

" Ay, of Meath, your honour ; in the barony of Navan, close beside the snug hamlet of Ardracran. There was I born ; and there was my father born before me : and there did he die ; and there, but for evil fortune, may Conner O'Carroll die also. I see it often in my dreams ; and I see my old mother, and I see my cousin Norah, and I peep into every creek and cranny, just as I had wont. 'Tis pity, your honour," after a long pause, that dreams fly away with

**sun-light. Holy St. Patrick ! I should like to dream of Ardbraccan to the end of life."**

Walter spoke not: his day-dream, like unto O'Carroll's night-dreams, had borne him to his native country; and all the tender ties, the dear associations of country, revived, and glowed anew.

"Belike," pursued O'Carroll, pressing close beside him, "you too know Meath, and Ardraccan also."

"Yes, I know Meath—I well know Meath," replied Walter, and a shuddering sigh swelled his bosom—"Meath is the county in which I was born—Meath was the cradle of my infancy. I did love its green bowers—I do love its green bowers, more than the sick man loves health, more than the blind man loves light! But see, yonder is the home of my daughter!" and smothering down his almost choking emotion, he again hurried forward.

**The road, winding in many a curve,  
outstripped**

outstripped the measure of his impatience, and long was it ere he neared the garden-hedge, and gained the garden-wicket. He looked anxiously around, but no well-known countenance greeted his approach; he called aloud on the name of Matilda, but no Matilda answered to the summons. The stillness of death prevailed; the deep trance, as of utter abandonment.

“It is the vesper hour,” said Walter, “and doubtless, she is gone to pray in the chapel of the white monks of Cîteaux.—Dear child! tender, affectionate, pious Matilda! Faith be thy reliance; prayer be thy staff: it will sustain thee through every ill of this world, and it will fit thee for thy translation to a better!—We will go to St. Mary’s,” he continued, addressing O’Carroll, “and join in the prayers of filial love”—and quick were the horses stowed, and the next instant, saw them speeding along

the narrow pathway, leading to the monastery.

Often, with limbs aching, with spirit drooping, had he trodden that pathway, cheered but by the cherub who prattled at his side: for Matilda had sustained him through every privation, had been his solace in the tempest, his sheet-anchor through each o'erwhelming blast of adverse destiny: and as he mused upon the past, as he dwelt on the graces of her mind, and the rare loveliness of her person, he mentally thanked Heaven for the new and honourable sanctuary she was about to enter. His heart felt lightened of every ill; the rugged track of war was despoiled of all its terrors: to know her safe was the balm necessary to peace; and whether he lived or died, that knowledge would be his solace.

As he pressed through the interlacing shrubs to seek a nearer track to the chapel, the full deep tones of the organ broke upon the stillness of evening, and the

the sacred psalmody of the choir, breathing of heaven and of heaven's peace, stole the wrapt soul from earth. He paused involuntarily ; he faced the west, and he saw the sun trembling in its transit : it was richly canopied in clouds of burnished gold, yet did it shed care and gloom upon his fancy ! He thought of the transit from life to death, of the pass of the spirit ; and he sighed at the destiny of man : for whether he be in joy or in grief ; whether bliss or woe, be his allotted portion, here below, he must fade—he must sink away—he must drop into the cloud of time ! A something like foreboding pressed upon his heart ; it was a cold, a shivering sensation, and he struggled against it ; he tried to smile at the lurking weakness, and with the name of Matilda rising to his tongue, he entered the chapel. He stood in the nave—he gazed anxiously around : the monks were all assembled, but no Matilda knelt in the midst : his heart sick-

ened; his cheeks, his lips grew bloodless; he clung to the tracery of one of the shrines, and he gasped for breath. This indeed was suspense, almost maddening, was torture, almost too keen for endurance; it robbed even heaven of a thought; for though he tarried in silence, he heard not a word of the nightly benediction.

The service closed, and one of the brotherhood moved towards him. He looked up—he spoke—surprise marked the recognition, and regret speedily followed.

Matilda had but once visited St. Mary's since the morn of Walter's departure: father Clovis had himself sought explanation at the cottage, but he had found it tenantless. Dire was this death-blow to peace and to honour: the heart, which peril could not daunt, yielded to this unexpected stroke of fortune; and Walter, shuddering back, as though smitten by the blast of fate, fell on the shoulder of O'Carroll.

CHAP.

## CHAPTER IX.

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"The thunder-cloud is skirted by the sunbeam;  
The bow—God's covenant of good-will to man,  
Tokens a brightening sky!  
So too, the travel of the stricken spirit,  
Upheld by heavenward trust, finds grace and favour."

THE return of life was the return of anguish. Matilda struggled from the arms which held her captive; she gazed around; she felt a world of woe upon her heart, for the same scene of loneliness spread itself before her: drear woods—tractless wilds—a frowning sky—and the traitor guide, who had lured her from security. Still did he wear the profaned garb of holiness; but exultation flashed in his eye, and triumph glowed in his features. She was alone, helpless, destitute; yet fortitude and resolution



solution grew in the trial; she felt it the season for self-command and for conduct, and firmly did she struggle against the rising weakness of her sex. A scheme, so deep, and so successful; so artfully planned, and so ably executed, was not to be foiled by tears and prayers. Alive to the fallacy of such dependence, and picturing security but in seeming conformity, she shrunk not from his proffered service, neither did she breathe invective or reproach, when the plaint of passion grated on her ear. Cold and passive, she suffered herself to be conducted back to the litter, and without a word, without a murmur, shrunk within its close shelter, eager to shut out the being most hateful.

Left to the torture of her own thoughts, harassed, perplexed, almost hopeless, a thousand wild schemes rose and faded successively; now fanning with the possibility of escape, now scaring with the anticipation of yet greater horror. She  
knew

knew not the name, the rank, the power of her persecutor; yet observation spoke him powerful, for he moved with a mighty host, and his nod seemed as the fiat of destiny. Wild and uncurbed will was as the pilot to his wanderings, and doubtless, the place of intended sojourn, would alike be closely hemmed in from all of human intervention. She thought of her father—she thought of the stranger, who had before saved her from insult; but alas! that dear father, that gracious stranger, was far beyond the reach of her cries. Desolate, as the dying dove in the pounces of the goshawk, a sickening terror pressed upon her feelings; she was alone, unseen, and the weakness of nature prevailed; she buried her face in her hands, and she yielded to a burst of sorrow. Never before had fate worn an aspect, so rayless, so thoroughly divested of promise, so totally bereaved of anticipation: she felt alone in the vast universe, shut out from  
all

all of succour, and exposed to the insults and persecution of prosperous vice: thrown upon the powers of her own mind, and left to the desperate strength of her own exertions. At any other period, the growing darkness of the sky, the hollow gusts of the wind, the dismal din of the thunder, and the vivid flashes of heaven's electric fire, had awakened dismay; now, she heard the wild clatter with feelings of melancholy quiescence, for misery pressed at her heart, and fears, keener and fiercer than death itself, saddened the dreams of her fancy. Each moment the litter moved slower and less steady, and the din of voices, rising in debate, mingled with the peltings of the tempest. Suddenly it stopped, and then the appalling accent of the pretended friar, fell like a mildew on her spirits.

“A little further,” he urged: “gain but yon tower, and safety and shelter are our own.”

The whip and the spur moved at his bidding;

bidding; but Heaven sanctioned not the enterprise, for the succeeding moment, the scared and goaded animal, writhing beneath the torture, stumbled and fell. Consternation and dismay grew in the instant: a loud shriek mingled with the louder din of the thunder: the friar, wrenching open the litter, bore his resistless victim from the trammel; and Matilda, like some fair flower, battered and broken, hung motionless upon his arm, the rain falling on her wan cheek, her eyes closed, and terror usurping every power of her being.

“To the tower! to the tower!” exclaimed the stranger, then tightly grasping his burden, he darted into the thicket; and though she felt the pressure of his arms, though she felt his quick breathing on her cheek, she lay as powerless, and as passive, as the infant nestling in the warm shelter of a mother’s bosom.

Bearing her through the long grass,  
with

with giant strength, like one breasting the waves of ocean, he broke through the intersecting underwood, and leaping each brake and barrier, paused not, until he gained the shelter of the tower; then, whispering assurances of safety, he shrunk within its darkened archway; and though it was a spot, drear even to desolation, blackened with the rust of time, and by man, neglected and forsaken, she hailed it with thankfulness, for it freed her from the trammel of his embrace. With knees tottering, and a heart, cold, almost unto death, she shrunk away from his side, and clinging to the damp wall, and murmuring a fervent prayer, strove to reassure and to fortify herself against the fearful emergency.

The stranger had cast off his cloak and hood, and the lightning, playing around the ruin, and piercing each nook and crevice, shone on his coat-of-mail, imparting strength, and almost awful dignity, to his still dark aspect. He

was

was tall, and fitly fashioned, and handsome, in the world's acceptation of the term, for his features were regularly marked, and his lips parted in a smile, indicative sometimes of sweetness, but oftener of irony ; his eyes too were dark and penetrating ; and the late mimicked bend of age, was now lost in the portly gait of the warrior.

The clatter of feet, and the hum of voices, spoke the advance of the retinue : but when they would have entered the tower, the stranger waved them back, and the next instant, Matilda was again alone with her persecutor. Dreadful was the blank of that instant ; it fell as the precursor of death itself ; a palsied trembling seized her, and an ice-chill chased the blood from her cheeks and from her lips ; for she read, in the ready obedience of this hireling crew, the perfect dominion of their tyrant leader.

The storm still raged, and the advance of night quickened in the inky blackness

ness of the heavens; the wind howled through the high branches, and the drifting rain mingled with the hoarser growl of the thunder. The stranger paced the square chamber in which they tarried; often he looked out, and often he muttered impatience at delay.—“ I fear we must sojourn until morning,” he exclaimed, pausing at the side of his trembling charge. “ ’Tis a rough shelter for gentleness and beauty, but ’tis better than a trackless wilderness.”

Matilda bowed her head; sinking with weariness and sorrow, she had no spirit for reply.

“ How like you a soldier’s fortune?” he pursued. “ Marry! ’tis thickly strewed with hardship; but hardship quickens invention, and invention genders comfort. Tarry yet a moment, lady, and judge my heart, by the bright blaze I kindle.”

As he spoke, he retreated to the door of entrance, and one low blast of the  
horn,

horn, was succeeded by cautious whispering. Time had been when curiosity had bent a ready ear, but terror now usurped each faculty, and Matilda continued clinging to the damp wall, her very lifeblood chilled within her; insensible to the war of the elements, to the awful din of the thunder, cracking and rolling, "e'en to the verge of heaven;" to the quick and quivering flashes of lightning, piercing, and flitting, and penetrating each time-worn crevice, and dragging into light, the utter desolation which prevailed. The tower, rocking to its foundation, had once been a fastness of strength, sited on a beetling rock, and frowning in defiance and security: now, it was dismantled and forsaken, an aerie for the birds of prey, a crying monument of the instability of all things earthly. But had the page of its resistance and its glory been clear as meridian sunshine—had the catalogue of the deeds of whole centuries been recorded—  
she



she had shrunk from the contemplation. It was self, it was local ill, which monopolized every thought ; it was the recollection of the grief and despair of her father, when returning to seek her, he should find the cottage desolate, which wrung every fibre of her nature ; it was that one conviction, which pressed eternally on her spirit, unfitting her for exertion, and harrowing her, almost to rebel against Heaven's enjoined mandate of submission.

One short hour, and the interior of the ruined fastness, wore a contrasting livery to its outward loneliness. Piled-up fagots crackled on the huge hearth, and coats, and night-cloaks, spread before the bright and ruddy blaze, lured to the blank of forgetfulness. But Matilda shrunk away from the hand which sought to lead her from her dark and cheerless corner : she had witnessed the preparations for comfort ; she had heard the frolic jest of many a light heart ; she  
knew

knew the retinue disposed in an outer chamber, and herself destined to wane away the hours of darkness in the presence of her persecutor.

"I shall not rest to-night," she exclaimed, waving him proudly back: "sleep is for the happy, not for the oppressed and the captive."

"Sleep is for the weary," replied the stranger, jestingly; "but by the badge of knighthood, I cannot sleep, when crushed beneath the weight of a lady's anger."

"Leave me," said Matilda, firmly. "I would be alone—I would, that heaven, and only heaven, should register my sighs."

"And would you turn me adrift on such a night?" he reproachfully asked—"would you hurl me from this warm and genial atmosphere, into all the death-horrors of the tempest? No, no, it is not woman's kindly nature: gentleness cannot adjure so harshly"—and as he

he spoke, he again essayed to draw her forward, but she shrunk away, as though his touch were poison.

“Words are vain,” Matilda rejoined; “reproaches idle. By a base and cruel fabrication you have cajoled me hither. I am in your power: you may despoil me of life, but never will I submit to my own degradation. Let your retinue be summoned hither, or grant me the security of a lone chamber.”

“How, lady! Would you, in a spot like this; a spot, so destitute, and so forlorn—would you brave the horrors of solitude? would you——”

“I would brave utter darkness—I would brave the horrors of this night of storm,” interrupting him, “rather than sojourn here.”

A momentary crimson flashed o’er the bronzed cheek of the unknown; he raised his eyes to her death-wan features, as reproachfully he uttered—“’Tis well the privilege of action rests not in your  
own

own keeping, else might you play the heroine to the despite of life."

"I would but fly the trammel, my principles, and my heart, revolts at," said Matilda: "this ruin, and this restraint, is worse than bonds and death."

"Yet must you endure until day-break," was his cold remark: then, after a pause of deep thought, he added—"May not danger lurk in this fitful perversion of all my aims and all my labours?"

"Danger to your own soul—danger to your own honour," firmly pronounced Matilda. "Leave me—I command you, leave me. My heart may be tutored to misery, but never to temporize with my own shame."

The stranger smiled disdainfully, but curbing the bent of his humour—"However the slave of a passion, omnipotent and holy," he returned, "scorn, and harsh severity, may stimulate to daring.

Have

Have a care, lady ; I would but warn of possibility."

As he spoke, he retreated a few paces, and stood, silent and moody, by the blazing hearth. Pale, trembling, and aghast, Matilda watched him in silence ; watched the workings of his distempered mind, as the fugitive flame, alternately paled and reddened his features : and when again he started into being, when again he pressed to her side, she sprung back, with an action, cold and repulsive.—“ Why dare me to revenge ? ” he asked ; “ why compel me to act against my nature ? ” Then muttering something of pride and woman’s fitful perversity, he paused, irresolute and doubtful.

“ I crave but one favour,” said Matilda, timidly—“ I crave but the privilege of being alone. Surely,” and she raised her dewy eyes in sad appeal, “ ’tis little to be accorded.”

“ ’Tis much—too much,” quick replied

plied the stranger. "In other circumstances, your wish should be law: but here, in this bleak and nearly roofless tower, tarrying but the return of the morning, think well, how can a chamber be fashioned to your comfort?"

"This chamber," said Matilda, firmly; "or, be this chamber, the one common rest of all."

"Not so, lady: the vulgar herd must not gaze upon perfection." Then, with seeming sorrow, "Alack! had I retained my hood and cloak, counter had been your will."

That hood and cloak—that fatal guise, which had lured her from her home, which had made her the voluntary sharer of his wanderings, stirred every warring feeling within her: it was anger, contempt, agony, which strove for mastery: tears swelled her eyes, and sighs, almost suffocating, heaved her bosom; yet stifling down the mighty conflict, and towering in out-

raged dignity —“ Respect and trust,” she exclaimed, “lived in the sacred calling: the violation of that calling, was the forfeiture of each.”

“ Nay, lady, blame the hand of Heaven, which made you all-perfect ; blame that skin of snow, that eye of fire : blame Fate herself, for strangely capricious, has she linked our destinies.”

Matilda shrunk away from the arm which strove to encircle her ; she spoke not, but she cast on him a glance of withering scorn.

“ ’Tis in vain to contend,” he resumed. “ The hour, when, on the banks of the Gartampe, I beheld you, beamy as the seraph of another world—that same hour was the last of my freedom. Lady, I love you ; fondly, madly love you ; and dear is the rate at which I have purchased this privilege of breathing my love. Nay, bear with me—bear me,” checking her effort to speak—“ mine is no cold and common passion, no fitful start  
of

of mere and transient admiration; it has become a vital part of my being; it has mingled with the breath I draw. I saw you in the convent-chapel, your dark hair, contrasting your brow of snow; your eyes, your hands, upraised, looking, like some mediating spirit, pluming for your native sky! I forgot the worship of the saints—I forgot all, but your heavenly beauty: my heart, felt you, Matilda; felt you, as it had never felt woman: it inhaled a new principle of action; it bosomed a dearer and a brighter hope.—I saw you depart from the chapel, and darkness and gloom remained. I pursued, I overtook you in the wood—I spoke of admiration, and you shrunk terrified away. I would have explained—I would have besought you to hear me—I——”

“Alas! why probe me anew with that moment of humiliation?” interrupted Matilda. “I would forget it—I would blot out the insult and the pang.”



“ Yet hear me to the end,” impetuously pursued the stranger ; “ hear your triumph and my dependence ; hear——”

“ ’Tis but vain words,” said Matilda, proudly : “ the end, as the beginning, leaves me the oppressed, you the oppressor.” And then she folded her arms in mute submission, and struggled for calmness, spite of the shuddering throes of outraged sensibility.

The stranger bit his lip ; a dark cloud gathered on his brow ; yet he checked the rising ire, willing to assure, rather than to intimidate.—“ Man is prone to error,” he observed, after the pause of a moment, “ and forgiveness is the one bounden bond of brotherhood. On this side eternity we owe it to each other, for the claim exists in the frailty of our nature.” He ceased, but Matilda continued silent, for the sentiments of the friar, did but deepen the hypocrisy of the man.—“ Lady,” and he spoke with trepidation, and he bent his dark eyes upon the  
ground,

ground, "in me there is much to be forgiven. I have erred, greatly erred; yet is it an error of the judgment, rather than the heart. The season for disguise is passed, and gentleness must be taxed. My birth is noble; and the prejudices of noble birth, the false bias of education, the latitude of custom, the—the—Lady," confused and hesitating, "I must be explicit. From one of the monks of St. Mary I gained the outline of your story: I found that your father, a moody and a melancholy man, toiled in the convent-garden; and that yourself, fashioned for the homage of mankind, smiled at obscurity, and shared his scant pittance. I heard that you lived in a lone cottage; that you braved every ill of life; that your mind was pure, as your form was matchless! I heard all this, and more than this; yet pride strove to crush the embryo flame, strove to root out the strange, the maddening ascendancy. The daughter of the gardener of the white

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monks

monks of Cisteaux"—and he raised his eyes as he spoke, and steadfastly regarded her—"was no match for the proud house of De Mauleon." Matilda did start, but it was not with surprise at the rank of her persecutor; it was with indignation, at the dark plot fast unraveling itself to view. — "Lady," he resumed, self-love misconstruing her agitation, "marvel not that pride should have made a stubborn stand; that the representative of a long race of nobles and of heroes should manfully have wrestled with the weakness of nature: but alas!" and there was much of seductive softness in his look and in his accent, "beauty, and innocence, and love, are omnipotent! Vain have I wrestled; vain have I strove: the flame which consumes me will burn to the end: up, or on my pillow: in the gloom of night, as in the midday beam, you, and you alone, colour the visions of fancy! To see you—to be with you—to love you,

you, have I submitted to disguise, have I condescended to subterfuge."

"And for this unhallowed privilege, am I brought hither; am I dragged, a reluctant prisoner, from home, and from security," exclaimed the indignant girl. "But know, proud lord of De Mauleon, not the descendant of a race of kings could qualify the depredation. Restore me to the shelter from which you have torn me, or give me safe conduct to the nearest monastery."

"What, and forego the hard-earned right of possession? No, lady: think what the attainment of that right has cost, and tax my fealty in another form."

"True," and Matilda heaved a heart-wrung sigh, "the temporizer of honour yields no restitution."

De Mauleon writhed beneath the implied sting, yet displeasure suited not his purpose: it was his aim, to win by gentleness, to lure by conciliation, to hush

to sleep every jarring principle militating against his plans, and in the coveted trance of security and dreaming confidence, to seize at last the promised harvest. Born to affluence, and reared in prodigal splendour, mixing with the profligate and the gay, the shameless latitude of example spurring the mad frenzy of passion, he thought not—for how can the disciple of such a school think?—of the peace he might mar—of the heart he might break—of the ruin he might achieve—of the total, the irremediable desolation he might heap upon his victim! he thought but of self, and even that self-thought ended in the fever of brief indulgence: it pierced not beyond this world of illusive vanity, beyond the headlong race of prosperous fortune; it neared not the shadows of time, neither did it dare the awful truths of death and judgment!

Savari, lord of De Mauleon, was a hero in that age of chivalry, when, to love,  
and

and to sacrifice all to love, was the bounden law of gallantry. His song was as the breath of passion; his hopes freighted on the smile of favour: buoyant on the downy pinion of romance, and wrapt in the tissue of illusion, he judged of woman's heart, as the prize of bold adventure; of woman's favour, as the sure award to dauntless daring.

"Lady," he said, watching the varying tints of her cheek, "tarry, until I win your gratitude, and then deal with me as you list: tarry, until safe lodged in the home, best suiting your worth and my homage, and tax, without reserve, my love and my prowess! If to beard a world, give the command, and my sword shall fly its scabbard: ay, lady, me and my brave followers; for our coursers shall be bridled, our——"

"I would fain know a prelude to my promised influence," eagerly interrupted Matilda, "in the boon I crave. Lord of De Mauleon, if you would win my

thanks, until morning, leave me this chamber to sigh in."

"Be it even as you wish," said De Manleon, laying his hand upon his breast, and bowing in lowly submission—"I go, to stretch me on the door-sill, and watch and guard your safety."

Even in this moment of bitter trial, something like gratitude thrilled in the pure bosom of Matilda, when she saw the door close upon her persecutor; when she found herself alone—"Jesu be praised!" she ejaculated: and then she marvelled at the mere shadow of joy, which, as light, darting askaunt the darkness, seemed to vary the blank of despair. "Joy! no, no, not joy; 'tis thankfulness," she murmured, "at the lesser evil of the train; thankfulness for this season of respite: he yields me time for thought and for self-possession! God grant the commune be not vain!"

She stood, with her hands clasped, with her eyes fixed upon the burning embers,

embers, revising, again and again, the wild vicissitudes of the last few days, and dwelling on the strange colour of her trials, until almost stupified by the rapidity and pressure of circumstances. Bitter was the heart-pang with which she thought of her father; painful, well-nigh to suffocation, the rush of her feelings: every pulse ached; every breath was laboured: nought but barrenness lay before her; black despair, and rayless grief, spread itself on every side. It was the moment of his return to the cottage, it was the utter waste of his hopes, it was the desolation of that once peaceful home, which overthrowing all composure, inflicted pangs almost too keen to feel and live.

Passing from woe to woe, from outrage to outrage, her cheek, alternately flushing and fading. her very spirit writhing beneath the sting of humiliation, she heard not the sound of horse-hoofs, and the buzz of voices, long swell-



ling and gathering in the pauses of the storm; nor until that buzz rose into shouts, until a loud pummelling on the outer entrance of the tower, spoke conviction to her senses, did she rally into the possible hope of rescue. She listened—she held in her breath, and tightly did she press her heart, lest its very throbbings should be audible, as a thousand wild conjectures crowded on each other: for there are situations in life, there are acmes in human ill, when aught of change must be welcome! Matilda had gained that point of peril; she stood upon that shelving brink, where change is as unction to the sick soul, and coveted freedom, and pictured rescue, broke, as a heavenward ray, upon the deep night of her prospects!

Suddenly, a corresponding commotion rose within the tower: she heard conjectures, and debates, and wavering indecision; she heard too the authoritative accents of her persecutor, and the  
next

next instant, all was lost in the loud din of the assailants. A crush marked the falling barrier; and the mingling of voices, the concordance of sounds, quick savoured of recognisance and peace.—Alas! where then were her hopes?—where, the fairy fabric she had erected? Crumbled, fallen, like many a fabric, as baseless, and as empty! She tottered back; she leant against the flinty wall, all of energy drooping within her, and looking the death-wan emblem of disappointment and horror.

As she stood, her face bent upon her bosom, her spirit stricken, her hands clasped in mute dismay, a voice from without rallied back the truant blood to her cheeks.—It was familiar, and it thrilled upon her heart like the harmony of heaven! — “I thought you with De Thouars: how then do I meet you, driven by the same storm, to the same shelter?”

De Mauleon, in reply, uttered something

thing of disablement from illness, something of excuse, by way of veiling his share in her removal; he spoke with embarrassment and trepidation, yet Matilda listened, but to catch the milder accents of the former speaker. That speaker spoke again; spoke of a high camp, of a sojourn until morning; spoke, until every pulse throbbed, every feeling thrilled to transport! Could it be the palmer?—could it be the disguised warrior, who, on the banks of the Gartampe, had rescued her from insult—as an uncle's messenger, had pierced within the cottage, and quitted it on the eve of her father's departure? Oh! if it should be! if it is! The possibility suffused her with the brightest crimson: and when, in the next instant, she marked the slow opening of the door, she made one spring forward, panting and eager, yet unconscious who she should meet.

De Mauleon—for it was De Mauleon himself, looked with strange surprise;  
he

he tokened silence, and carefully reclosing the door, led back to the nearly darkened extremity of the chamber; then stopping, and pointing to the cloak and hood he bore on his arm—"Lady," he whispered, "if you would prevent murder—if you would save yourself from outrage, quick assume this garb, and speak not. A host, an armed brigand, surround the tower: we will fight to the death: but caution may save the venture."

"What, and tamper with my own disgrace? profane a holy garb to aid a ravisher? Never—never;" and Matilda waved him back, and stood in firm defiance.

"Not if I swear to hold your wish as holy?" asked De Mauleon, pressing to her side, and earnestly regarding her. "Grant but my boon, and on my soul, never shall rule be mine! Nay, on my knees, lady, I make it—on my knees. List to me—yield to me: I would but  
save

save you from a ruffian crew, whose law is inclination."

"And for yourself," disdainfully questioned Matilda; "who shall save me from that worst peril of the two?"

"Nay, nay, hear me—hear reason," urgent and anxious—"This cloak will veil all knowledge of your sex. Think of the deadly snare: to brave the ill is sure destruction." As he spoke, he turned often to the door, as though apprehensive of intrusion; and when he ceased, he tried to cast the cloak around her: but agile as a young fawn, she eluded the effort, and in a voice of firm decision, pronounced—"Be my cause in the hand of Heaven!"

Agitating, almost to bewilderment, was the flight of the succeeding hours. Matilda was left alone; left to conjecture and suspense; left to the busy coinage of her own fancy. The fire had died away, and a few embers alone smoked and mouldered on the hearth: darkness,

as of the tomb, and silence too, reigned around ; for nought could she hear, save the deep breathing of those, whom weariness had lulled to repose;—who, unlike herself, the world forgetting, had lost its cares and its thorns in the deep blank of slumber. The storm too, spent, as it were, by its own fury, was now hushed and still ; the rough gusts had died away ; and the night-wind, sighing mournfully and hollowly, sounded, like the plaint of some lone spirit, wailing o'er the havock of the past.

Often did Matilda recall the voice, so silver-sweet, so touching, and so thrilling ; often did she ponder, how best to arouse the hero of her fancy, to awaken him to the sense of her danger and her wrongs : but difficulty met her on every side ; peril threatened ; interference teemed with blood and murder : and such wild fears crowded on each other, that subdued to weeping, and heedless of each existing blessing in the seeming desolation around, she cast herself upon the  
floor,

floor, despairing of the present, and desperate almost of the future.

The gloaming of morning, seen through a high loophole in the tower—misty and dim, fit close to a night, so long and so wearisome—roused her to necessary exertion. Not once had she lost herself; not for one single moment had sleep cheated her of sorrow: fitful and murmuring, she had prayed for mercy at the close of night; now, at the birth of new day, did she raise herself upon her knees, and contrite and humble, and probing the depths of her own heart, did she ask—not a brighter destiny—but patience and submission under every trial.—“It is fit I should be afflicted,” she murmured; “yet will the God of Grace and pity fashion the back to the burden!”

Assured and strengthened; for religion is the sure staff to the sick soul, the disseminator of comfort, when all of earthly comfort fails; though the bright blaze of her beauty was faded by watch-

ing and woe, yet was her young spirit re-braced, and her mind re-invigorated : and when gathering sounds, indicative of moving breathing man, grew with the growing day, she shrunk not, neither did she sicken at the coming struggle. Busy preparation spoke in the tread of feet and hum of voices :—Matilda climbed to the loophole ; she gazed—not on the lone forests, not on the sterile heights, capped in cloud and vapour—but on the huddled group of horses and of men, immediately at the base of the tower.

Was this the armed brigand, the rufian crew, from whom she was bid to shrink ? so neat and trim, so fashioned to the cause and purposes of war ! Suddenly, her breath felt to stop, her very heart's pulsation wavered : she saw De Mauleon ; and at his side, the mysterious palmer, the brave unknown, so awful in dignity, so preeminent in beauty, so gifted above the myriad ; yet wearing  
the



the same brow of thought and sadness !  
She bent forward—she fixed her eyes  
upon his towering form—no longer  
shrouded in the dun vest of penance,  
but cased in polished steel; his vizor  
up, shaded, crested by a plume of sable,  
looking, more dignified, and brighter  
far, than—

“ The poet’s incarnation of his God,  
In all his marble sculptured beauty !”

She heard him speak, and she felt that  
within unfelt before : it was a pleasurable,  
it was an agitating, it was an undefinable  
emotion. She saw him grasp the extended  
hand of De Mauleon, as though in adieu.  
But when she saw him move forward; when  
she saw his own hand upon the flowing mane  
of his war-horse, the impulse and the act were  
one.—She thrust her white arm through the  
loop-hole—she shrieked out—“ Save me !  
save me !” then losing all of strength and  
hold, she fell back upon the floor.

CHAP.

CHAPTER X.  
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“Midst fear and trembling, peril and despair,  
Still is the bond knit ; and all the future  
Schemes of busy life, made subject to the  
Business of a few brief minutes.”

RAPID almost to dizziness was the change in Matilda's destiny: from the lowest depths of despair, did she find herself called into joy, and gratitude, and hope! —“Fear not: Heaven sides with innocence!” and the voice which whispered the glad conviction, quickened the pulses at her heart, and rallied the truant blood to her marble-like features. She raised her head from the breast which pillowed it—she met the softly beaming eyes of the palmer: all within was gentleness and mild assurance: no blood had been spilt; no mortal strife had marked the  
moment

moment of deliverance: his plumed casque lay on the floor beside him, and glad surprise, and instinctive urbanity, shining, as a halo, around his brow, imparted a radiance almost dazzling.

Still in the dismantled tower, in the lone chamber, the seat of her last night's trial, every thing impressed the force of obligation: she murmured gratitude, but language was too faint to paint the gratitude she felt: hers was a sensation at heart, wild, thrilling, almost overpowering; a sensation of delight, of transport, of bliss, past telling; a sensation, flooding her checks, and stamping irreversibly, the die of her future life! Rapid was the exchange of explanation: soon was the artless tale of Matilda told: the warrior-palmer listened with touching interest; sometimes his eyes radiating in softness; but oftener, in the known treachery of De Mauleon, flashing the scathing fire of indignant rage. —“A recreant to knighthood! a stain upon

upon his fellow men!" he exclaimed; and then, smothering down his ire, and gently bending, his features beamed such scintillations of soul, that his very smile seemed to utter—"In thy rescue, am I the debtor of De Mauleon?"

But to the enwrapt Matilda, darkness still shrouded the events of the last half hour, and quick did her eloquent glance question of what her lips could not utter. 'Twas then she heard, that the season for unmasking villainy, is often a season, imbecile and subduing:—that her shriek, that her hand, seen through the loophole of the tower, like some denouncing phantom, ghastly and wan from the tomb, had paralyzed the power and the actions of her ravisher:—that De Mauleon, confounded and self-condemned, conscious of the weakness of his means, and the still greater weakness of his cause, had slunk away, with shame burning deeper than on his cheek; that followed by his retinue, and abandoning her

her to the protection of her champion, he had quitted the tower, without explanation, without one effort at excuse.

“But he shall hear further of the deed,” said the stranger knight; “neither birth nor power shall shield from the just indignation of outraged honour. I will confront him in the face of princes, and tax him with the mildew on his fame.”

“Not so—not so, sir knight,” implored Matilda, yielding to the strange wild terror which pressed upon her heart: “aim not, I pray you, a pang, so keen, as the endangering your safety. Oh, spare me the hereafter horror of involving you!” And then she ceased, and trembled; for the eyes of the palmer brightened, and his cheeks glowed a colouring, as vivid as her own.

Was it sin, to yield to the dangerous charm of her beauty, to indulge in the brief bliss of admiration? Here was woman, in all her witchery: young, artless,

less, beamy! lovely as Eve before the fall! gifted beyond her compeers, and rare, as the fabled flights of poet's fancy!

"And such interest for me!" mused the palmer, perusing her varying features, and yielding to the momentary bewilderment of joy—"such soft, such soul-thrilling sensibility! God of nature! this then is a creature, to indemnify her whole sex!" Then quick recovering from the subtle dream—"Fear not for me," he said. "My life, lady, is given to another calling: the common cause of right and justice beggars all claim on individual feeling."

"Then should you meet this lord of De Mauleon," eagerly returned Matilda, "you will efface this incident; you will forget all of the present hour."

"*Forget*," and he smiled reproachfully. "Alack, lady! as well may you bid the weary forget rest—the hungry forget food.—I shall never forget this hour! Said I not"—and his voice sank

to softness—" *the daughter of the unknown gardener of the white monks of Cisteaux would live as a sunbeam on my fancy?*"

Again did Matilda's eyes sink beneath the sunny glance of his; again did Matilda's heart throb almost audibly. Those words, those electric words, so fondly cherished, so often recalled, awakened such a string of remembrances, opened such a volume of the past, that the thoughts, and the hopes, and the magic speculations of infant passion, revived in all their witchery: the wild and woody pathway, the silvery current of the Gartampe, the rose-embowered cottage, mellowing in the fairy moonbeams, recalled but the image of her preserver; and cradled in all the enthusiasm of youth and nature, drew such rich drafts upon her gratitude, that life itself seemed too short a span to pay back the boon.

"Lady," he resumed, joying in her emotion, "there is that in the romance  
of

of our first meeting, which defies forgetfulness ; and in this our present meeting, methinks forgetfulness can hold no part."

" The forgetfulness of death—alone the forgetfulness of death," faltered Matilda : then hesitating, and trembling with ill suppressed feeling—" I fear this lord of De Mauleon—I fear his violence—I fear his revenge—I fear—alas ! I know not what I fear"—and she burst into tears.

The stranger knight bent over her ; he whispered the softest words of assurance ; he besought composure, until his own voice caught the infection of her emotion, until his own heart thrilled with a feeling, he falsely judged was dead within him. For a moment his arm encircled her waist ; for more than a moment, he yielded to the sweet delirium of the senses : it was Elysium which spread itself around ; it was a bright and beautiful futurity which lay before him : the past, the appalling past, was lost in the



gay dream: every pang which had arisen, every tear which had been shed, was forgotten in this new era of his being.

“Matilda,” he whispered, “you have shed balm in the cup of my life; you have poured oil upon the rankling rust of hate and malice! Matilda! lovely Matilda! I can forgive my enemy *now*.” As he spoke, he pressed her white hand to his lips and to his forehead; then, with a smile, confiding and tender—“You have re-moulded the man—you have softened down the savage—you have scattered the rocky and the barren desert of life, with the bright flowers of Paradise! Ah, beware, how you cozen me with other than reality!” He shuddered as he spoke, and Matilda shuddered also; for she saw that open brow clouded, and those bright blue eyes, kindling with more than their wonted fire: yet was it a transient o’erclouding, a brief gust of anger, rather than of  
bleeding

bleeding feeling; a gust, scudding as a summer storm, and yielding, like a summer storm, to quick returning sunshine. He looked up, and every vestige of care was flown: it was happiness, it was confidence, it was peace, which lived in that look! "I bless Heaven," he exclaimed, "for the trials of the past! I bless Heaven, for griefs, which were wellnigh overwhelming! They have chastened me; they have fashioned me for moderation and for gratitude; they have taught me the salutary lesson of self-knowledge, and armed me against all the subtle snares of pride and distempered arrogance." Then turning to the wondering girl—"Matilda," he pursued, "the present alone is before us: the future baffles all research. Will you confide in the honour of a soldier?—will you submit to the rough shelter of a camp? Trust me, fair one," and he smiled encouragement, "though harsh ungentle spirits, we will hem you in

from danger; we will tend you with firm and tried zeal: for, as the blessed reliquaries of holy church, ever sacred be the daughter of a brother warrior.”

Matilda could not speak; her heart was full; her eyes alone were eloquent; she could only stretch forth her hand, in token of the confidence she felt: and when again he uttered something of apology for the coarse fare and coarser usages of a camp, something of assurance for safety and protection, she placed that hand upon that wildly throbbing heart, as softly she articulated—“In Heaven and you I trust!”

How often, in our progress through life, does external objects take colour from internal thoughts; does the mind's tranquillity, as “the halcyon brooding on the wave,” impart tranquillity around! Matilda had quitted the tower, and mounted on a low palfrey, at the side of the stranger knight, threaded the same wild passes, which scarce twelve hours before,

before, she had tracked in such different fellowship: then, the very heavens frowning on the calling; now, a gay and cloudless sun, gladdening, and cheering all of created nature.

Could it be the same rocks, the same woods, the same ridgy summits?—could it be the same mountain passes, which then wore an aspect so desolate? “Oh, no, no!” and Matilda spoke aloud her thoughts—“not the same wilds—scarce the same world!”—and then she blushed at the import of the words she uttered.

“Yes, the same wilds; the same, same world,” said the stranger, smiling at her enthusiasm. “Then a captive; now free to exercise your slightest wish. I bear you to the camp, because duty claims my presence: when at the camp, lady, you become the agent of your own actions.”

The distance was scarce felt; the three hours’ travel, brief as a blissful dream:

the palmer-warrior pointed out each beauty of the varying landscape; and he lingered o'er each beauty, and he mingled each beauty, with such poetic colourings, with such sportive flights of rich and luxuriant fancy, that enwrapt and wondering, Matilda lost all of earth, exchanged all of this world's turmoil, for the brighter and the calmer glories of Elysium. Every green valley, and every meandering stream, and every wooded knoll, seen through the magic vista of illusion, was tranced in other than their native loveliness: it was the rosy finger of first passion which spread the fairy veil; it was Love, mysterious Love, which scattered the tints of Iris!

The busy action of a camp, the clatter of arms, the buzz and hum of commingling sounds, recalled Matilda from her dream of other worlds. She heard the exchange of watchwords, and soon lifted from the palfrey; and upheld by the arm of her conductor, and blushing,  
and

and sensitive, and shrinking from every eye, did she thread the narrow avenues leading to her canvassed home! Yes, it was home, sweet home! and gratitude embalmed it in her heart's core; for within its close and calm shelter, did she woo the only repose she had known since her removal from the cottage! There did she live again o'er the past; there did she experience the studied service, did she smile upon those silent, unobtrusive, kindly attentions, so dear and so dangerous, so replete with the after joy or misery of life; did she inhale the magic breath of first enthrallment, and forge the rivets of an adamantine chain. Scarce conscious of the lapse of time, whose

“ ——— Wheel moves on,  
With life's dread changes fraught,”

the evening of the second day found Matilda still sojourning in the camp; still tended by the mysterious palmer,

her safety guarded, and her comforts watched; joying in the attentions, in the growing solicitude of a being, whose rank and whose very name was yet unguessed at; pining for nought beyond his converse, and bartering peace for the mere dream of indulgence. Once she spoke of parting, and the bare anticipation chased the bloom from her cheek; she met the eyes of the warrior rivetted upon her, and in the glance she deciphered care and sorrow.

“Whither would your wishes tend?” he asked. “Say not to the cottage, Matilda, for danger lurks in the perseverance of De Mauleon.”

Matilda stifled down a sigh.—“True,” she murmured; “the game of treachery may be reacted. Not in the cottage, but in the sure protection of my dear father.”

“Your father, lady, seeks the scenes of hostile strife: he sides with the legions of the king of France:—and called to  
active

active service, how can he hold forth shelter?"

"Yet will he seek me at the cottage," said Matilda, earnestly. "He bid me tarry his return: alas! should he have returned already"—and the pictured pang of his despair flooded her eyes with tears.

Every tear fell upon the heart of the stranger: he stood, silent and watchful, for he revered the throes of filial love, and he felt almost to worship the young and guileless being before him.—"Matilda," he said, and his accent was soft and thrilling, "name what can give you peace? Tax me even to the risk of life."

"My father," faltered the maid—"I would learn of the movements of my dear father."

"What if I dispatch a messenger to the white monks of Cisteaux?"

Matilda stretched forth her hand.—  
"Honoured friend of my father," she



pronounced, "what—what do I not owe you?"

"Pay me with a smile," whispered the palmer; then bowing on the hand he held—"Matilda," he pursued, "you have paid me—amply repaid me already!"

It is not for us to resolve the balmy dream of the palmer, or to dive amid the darkened folds of the past: if sorrow had harboured in his bosom, hope now chased the intruder thence; if treachery had once gnawed on his quiet, and waged against his repose, confidence and exultation now triumphed over every lingering weakness! Here was a creature, more rare than ought he had ever seen of breathing woman! more beautiful—

"Than precious sardonyx, or purple rocks  
Of amethysts, or glistening hyacinth!"

A creature, all heart, all feeling, unconscious even of the power of her extreme  
loveliness,

loveliness, and unvitiated by one single taint of the world's levities, formed to grace a courtly circle, yet shining best in the still circle of domestic life ! a creature, worthy of love, almost of worship, reposing on his honour, confiding peace and fame to his guardianship ! “ And is it for me,” he mused, gazing on her varying features—“ is it for me to awaken love in that soft bosom ?—to steal, by the honeyed path of gratitude, to that soft heart ? God of nature ! how blind are we to our own good ! how often are seeming evils blessings in disguise ! how often do we arraign destiny, when the seeds of trial gender in our own passions !”

Scarce a sound was stirring ; scarce a breeze ruffled the calm repose of sunset : supported by the arm of the stranger, Matilda had wandered from the camp ; and now far beyond the busy hum of men, was she in a spot, beneath a sky, challenging the boasted preeminence of Italy ; a sky, still burnished with golden glory,

glory, still tissued with many a purple and many a crimson cloud ! a spot, wild, and wide, and diversified ; dotted with hills and forests, and freshened with wreathy rivulets !

The palmer spoke of the joys and the ills of human life ; of the few evils inflicted by Providence, of the numerous evils inflicted by man. 'Twas evident he had drank of the wormwood-draught of disappointment and endurance ; yet was that draught so tempered, that in expatiating upon the shadowy base of sublunary reliance, he spoke, he looked, as though young hope still harboured midst the ruin.

"Time has been, when I uttered nought save murmurs," he exclaimed : "now, my murmurs are turned into thankfulness. I was the victim of illusion and false reliance : I now joy in the very privation, which then made up the sum of my misery."

"Perchance,

“Perchance, the fancied, was greater than the real ill,” said Matilda, timidly.

“Rather deem it the wounds of bleeding self-love,” quick rejoined the unknown, “the struggles of mortified pride. Surely, in our intercourse through life, in our gradual appreciation of character, the ingratitude of those we have loved and trusted, is the sharpest, keenest shaft, aimed at the heart: it recoils upon judgment; it shames us, in the shallowness of our own foresight.”

Matilda looked up; she traced sadness on the brow of her companion; his cheek was pale—his lip quivered—and his eyes were bent upon the earth.—“Ingratitude,” she repeated, and she spoke in the artlessness of her nature—“Holy Mary! can your love have been slighted—can your trust have been deceived?”

Ah! what had she uttered! what fairy spell had she cast around! She turned away her blushing face; she bent it—almost buried it on her bosom—for the  
start,

start, the gaze, the emotion of the palmer, filled her with dismay.

“ Know you what you say, Matilda ? —know you the import of your words ? ”

“ I did but say—I did but think,” she faltered out, “ that the play of feeling, the farce of pretended love, could ne’er have been practised upon you.”

“ Did you think,” said the stranger, eagerly and anxiously, “ that treachery harboured not in woman ?—or, did you think, that my love—that my trust, merited a better fate ? ”

“ A better—a brighter fate,” exclaimed Matilda, yielding to the enthusiasm of her feelings—“ a fate of cloudless, of setless sunshine ! Oh ! if my prayers be but heard, your fate on earth, will be the earnest of hereafter heaven ! ”

“ Beware, Matilda ! I am but man—I am frail, and weak, and vain : enthusiasm, mere enthusiasm, may tempt to my undoing. If the fervour of gratitude alone—if it spring not from a deeper dearer

dearer source, beware ! beware !" He spoke with passion, and his whole frame shook with the agitation of his feelings.

" Alas !" and Matilda's voice was trepidation, " what can I say ? I scarce know what I would say. Surely," and she glanced timidly upon him, " gratitude is the deepest—dearest spring of human feeling ! Have you not snatched me from a fate more insupportable than death ? How then, through a long life—should Heaven so will it—can I divorce you, from the brightest, sweetest recollections ?"

" But, Matilda"—and he spoke with earnestness—" know you not that man is presumptuous, encroaching, aspiring ; that craving after something, unpossessed, the pure cold meed of gratitude would fall short of happiness ?—know you not, that the heart craves more than thanks ?—that the heart covets more than gratitude ? Till I beheld you, the sweet current of social feeling was dead  
within

within me : the smile of woman, mockery ; the love of woman, a snare, baited with poison. Outraged confidence, and misplaced reliance, had stirred a hell within me—I lived but for revenge and hate—I waged war with my whole race—I thought interest the spur of every action ; sinister design, and ravening ambition, the soul of every aim. Tottering on the verge of cold misanthropy, I judged man, immersed in self ; and woman—forgive me, Matilda—beautiful, and tempting, and rapturous to the eye : but as the painted waxen apples of Sodom, full of emptiness and ashes. It was you, so innocent, so unconscious, so confiding, who were destined to redeem your whole sex ; to melt the marble ; to lure me back to sanity and to health ! Ah, then, Matilda ! talk no more of gratitude ! To you—what do I not owe to you !”

“ Be it the mutual bond of good-will and harmony,” replied Matilda, and her smile

smile spoke the joy and thankfulness of her heart.

“Plighted here in the sight of Heaven,” said the palmer: “far away from the scenes of active life, and witnessed but by God and nature!” The tone of his voice was soft, but it was solemn; the words themselves—and more than the words, the manner, thrilled on her feelings, and awakened thought and sadness: it seemed as the prelude to separation; it sounded almost as the melancholy knell of adieu. She raised her eyes, and she met his fixed upon her: his features wore more than their ordinary paleness; or perhaps, it was the deepening shadows, for the dying light of day but faintly tinged the distant uplands.—“Matilda,” he resumed, “in life or death, be the compact preserved. If I live, be it my guerdon; if I die, be it the last bright ray of earth.”

He paused, but Matilda could not answer; her eyes, her heart was full; her  
arm



arm was linked in his—her hand lay passive in his: she felt the security of his presence, yet did an unknown horror press upon her spirits; never, till now, had war teemed with such desolation; never had the prospect of after-life assumed an aspect so blank. Often did she shudder, and often did she start, as the sighing wind swept o'er the long grass: in every waving shrub she conjured some ambushed foe; in every passing sound, some herald of approaching danger.—He spoke again, and her disquietude and her despondence increased; for he spoke of the cause of conflict—of the pressing calls upon his own exertion—of a land rent with civil discord.

“ Yet be my fate prosperous, or be it adverse,” he pronounced, “ the remembrance of this night, Matilda, will shed sunshine upon the gloom. If doomed to a dungeon's darkness, your image will bear me fellowship; if gasping forth life on the field of honour, your remembered

ed pity, will fall, as precious unction on my wounds. Nay, weep not, gentlest of friends! sweetest, best of comforters! 'Time was, when no such panacea was mine; when like a rough and stormy sea, my heart owned no one anchor of reliance; now, Matilda, to know you safe, to place you beyond the threat of peril; and the path of duty, though winding amid thorns and briars, becomes a path of down."

Alas! that place of safety, that spot of refuge, augured separation, and Matilda shuddered beneath the ice-chill which bleached her cheek; yet never, in the hours of brightest bloom, had she looked more lovely:—the tear which swam in her eye, gave softness to expression; the sigh which swelled her bosom, spoke volumes to the heart. Cast by imperious circumstances upon his protection, shut away from every kindred tie, bound to him by gratitude and by feeling, was it marvel, that the combining magic of youth,

youth, and innocence, and beauty, should supersede every past impression—should expunge every dream of former thralldom? He read interest in that dark and melting eye; he read favour in that sensitive emotion.

The breeze bared her snow-white forehead; the moonbeams played upon her features; for

“ Peering in silv’ry panoply of light,  
And scatt’ring round her imitative day,”

night’s crested planet had arisen from the dark deep umbrage of wood-crowned heights, and sailing, in silence, and in glory, dappled earth’s carpet with a thousand picturesque varieties. Often, did his name, his rank, his expectations, rise to his lips: he wished not concealment; he wished to woo her in his own acknowledged calling: but caution, and policy, and some secret cause within, checking the disclosure, drove the half-formed impulse back into his heart. It

was

was fear for her safety, not for her discretion ; it was the knowledge of her enthusiasm, which hurrying into danger, might bare her to the recklessness of revenge. He knew not how to body the wild romance floating on his fancy ; yet was his fancy, pregnant with a romance, so harmonizing, so freighted with all that was bright and joyous, that it made up the measure of felicity : and when again he spoke, his voice thrilled with such pleasurable sensations, his features radiated with such internal sunshine, that Matilda gazed on him with glad surprise. — “ Marvel not,” he exclaimed, “ though in a land, torn by conflict, and cursed with the rage and ravages of war, at this blessed moment, I feel an earnest of hereafter happiness. Matilda, this storm may pass away ; this civil discord, may become smooth and still, as yon halcyon scene around us. The very heavens sleep on the broad blue waters fertilizing the fields and the valleys : why  
may

may not man, for whom those fields and valleys smile, for whom nature holds forth so many blessings—why may not man, grateful for the prodigal bounty, pay back the mighty debt, in other than war and ruin. Matilda”—and he spoke with earnestness and feeling—“till now, I never hoped so much at the hands of my fellow-men; now, you have taught me the precept, to forgive, as we would be forgiven!”

“Ah! may that hope be realized!” exclaimed Matilda, bosoming all his enthusiasm—“may that precept be fulfilled! may man, in gratitude to Heaven, deal mercy to his fellow!”

“Amen!” pronounced the palmer; and he gazed on her as on a creature of another world; for her features had caught the colour of her feelings, and her dark eyes, raised to the vaulted sky, and her smile, savouring of pious trust, gave token of holiness and heaven. “Yet, Matilda,” he pursued, after a pause

pause of deep thought, "knowing man as he is, we must guard against his violence and his injustice. Your father is away—I may be away—Alas! why should I wound you? I would but snatch the tender dove from the pounces of the vulture. Matilda, I fear more than De Mauleon: seeing you, I fear *all* who see you."

"Perchance," said Matilda, eagerly, "my dear father already seeks me at the cottage; perchance——"

"'Tis best we tarry the return of our messenger then," interrupted the unknown. "Be your father the fittest fashioner of our movements."

The words of Walter, when intrusting her with the sad tale of his sorrows, recurred to memory; and heavily did Matilda sigh, as she rejoined—"My father once spoke of a religious sanctuary. He bid me, should I survive him; should I stand alone in the world; should—should——" Her voice falter-

ed, and her eyes were gemmed in tears.

Terror marked the start of the palmer. "Not the veil : speak, Matilda : surely your father willed not a fate so rayless ?"

"Oh no ! not willed," replied the artless girl. "He bid me seek it, as a last resource, when all of human hope, and human comfort failed."

"Be it the *last resource*, the *very last resource* of earth," said the palmer : then fervently and solemnly — "God grant, that other duties, that other claims, rivet you to this world, and to this world's interests ! Matilda"—and he spoke almost inwardly—"whilst I live, be the offering withheld."

The walk back to the camp passed in silence, but it was—

"Silence that speaks, and eloquence of eyes,"

for each alike was absorbed in the one bright trance of fascination and interest : —Matilda, pondering on the words of  
the

the palmer ;—the palmer busied in the speculations of his own fancy ; gazing on the angel form upheld by his arm, and quaffing rich draughts of future care at the enigmatical and mystic fount of love and beauty : nor till they neared the camp, till human sounds boded of human calling, did other than illusion prevail. Hapless Matilda ! well might she dwell upon the brief bright moments of bliss ;—moments, in the drear gulf of destiny, which as the splendour of a cloudless sunset, lingers long after the burnished orb has disappeared ;—moments, in this our pass to the tomb, so transient and so rare, that to cherish them, is but to shed a borrowed ray, to chequer the every-day contrast of blank uniformity ! and when within the canvassed shelter of her tent—when alone and musing on the thrilling “ good night ” of the palmer—she did cherish them ; and she bosomed the rich remembrance, and she hugged the flower-tis-



sued illusion, as the brilliant of, purest water, most shining, and most dazzling, in its own dark pit of earth !

She sank to sleep, with thanksgiving on her lip, and hope nestling in her bosom ! and she awoke from a balmy dream, cheating with all that her heart pined after :—her father and the palmer :—she saw them blest and blessing, knit in firm concord, and pouring on her head, all that earth could claim or yield ! She awoke, and she started erect, and every bright image vanished ; for she heard confused and mingled sounds ; the clank of arms, and presently the blast of trumpets ; the tramp of feet too, and the buzz of voices.

Quick did terror steal over the calm peace of the preceding night : her pulses wildly throbbed ; her heart misgave her ; she listened, and each moment suspense and apprehension gathered. She heard a low whispering, and springing from the couch, and quick resuming her habit,  
and

and wrapping herself in the close folds of her veil, she pressed close to the entrance. Distinctly did she hear the voice of the palmer.

“ Every other tent must be struck,” he exclaimed. “ The notice is peremptory, and little time is given to preparation.”

“ Say you at Parthenay, my lord ?” asked a voice.

“ Ay,” rejoined the palmer. “ King John and his legions have invaded the territory of our stanch ally the lord Geoffry de Lirenan ; and now besieged in his castle of Novent, he claims succour at our hands.”

Matilda shuddered back : cold grief pressed at her heart : here indeed was a solution to the mystery ; here was the termination of peace and safety.

“ Bestir thee !” pursued the palmer. “ I would be chary of time, yet would I not rudely break upon the slumbers of our unconscious charge.”

Scarce sensible of the action, Matilda drew back the canvas entrance. It was the hour when night and morning meet ; —and white as the foam of ocean, she stood in the door-way, like some fair ghost of the hill, descending amid mist and gloom !

The palmer sprung to her side—he took her hand—he drew her gently into the tent ; then quickly closing it—“ Matilda,” he exclaimed, and his cheek was flushed, and his accent hurried, “ the pang of parting threatens ; the dream of bliss terminates. I must bear you hence—I must place you in security ; and shaking off the enervating trammel of thought, I must awaken to the call of duty.”

Matilda could only sob.—

“ Presentiment, the superstition of tender hearts,”

gathered in such thick and darkened clouds, that future life held forth no ray of promise.

“ List

“ List to me, dear one,” he continued, “ and let that gentle heart plead for the seeming charge of precipitation. I had hoped here to have tarried the return of our messenger: but it must not be: neither must I bear you into the strifes and perils of war. Alack! it would make a coward of me—it would dispossess me of myself. The mandate of the royal Philip is imperative. I go to meet the usurper John: but ere I go—almost this very hour—Dear, dearest Matilda, I come a suppliant. If I could bare my heart, you would see—you would read—you—you—Matilda,” earnestly and eagerly, “ truth, affection, warm tender interest, shape the boon I crave: it is no sudden gust of passion, bewildered by seductive beauty; no imperious spring of maddened feeling. I have brooded over it, weighed it, analyzed it; and cool unbiassed reason, and necessity, and common worldly policy, side on the action.”

“What mean you?—what action?” questioned Matilda, for the palmer had ceased, and though steadfastly regarding her, was evidently methodizing his own designs.

“This is no time for delay,” he resumed, starting from absorption. “Matilda,” and he took her hand, and held it clasped within his own, “list to me. Time was when my heart was ice: you have melted the ice; you have stirred all of humanity within me; you have awakened other feelings, other hopes. Ah! can you not read those feelings?—can you not decipher those hopes? Angel of my destiny! friend! soother! comforter! Matilda”—and he bent his knee before her —“I love you; tenderly, fondly love you: love you with a fervour I never thought my worn-out heart could have felt—love you, for your innocence, for your confidence—love you, with a love, holy and sacred. Become my own—become my wife; the partner  
of

of my weal and woe : give me the right to defend you : and though we part on the instant, that conscious right, will be as a heaven-lighted pharos, through all the gloom and blank of absence."

He ceased, but Matilda could not answer ; power was denied her ; emotion was too wild for speech ; alternately did her cheek vary from crimson to snow ; her brain felt dizzy ; her very breathing became suffocating. It was joy, overwhelming joy, which rushed in full tide on her feelings, which bent her, trembling and panting, upon the upholding arm of her acknowledged lover :—for wrapped as he was in mystery and disguise, long had he been the secret wish of her soul, the dear, the coveted pledge of this world's happiness.

" Matilda," he murmured, and for the first time he folded her to his heart, " be one hope, one destiny, ours. In

this our parting, be the rite of holy church, our bond of future union."

"My father! my dear father!" faltered Matilda, and the recollection of the absent Walter roused her to exertion and to fortitude. "Oh, no, no!" she pursued, struggling against the weakness of her own nature, "not unsanctified by my father's approval—not unblessed by my father's presence."

"At any other season," said the palmer, eagerly, "I could worship these scruples, these tender delicacies: now, I must strive to conquer them. Observation tells me your father was not born to the humble calling of gardener to the white monks of Cisteaux: yet, Matilda"—and he spoke with conscious dignity—"did royal blood flow in the veins of your father, my blood would be no stain to the lineage. Fears for your security bid me veil the splendour of my name: did I fight the mere battles of my country, my name might  
gird

gird you in with safety ; as it is, my name would but graft revenge on the chance exultation of conquest. I would become your husband, Matilda—strange stipulation ! yet would I—must I withhold my name. Bear with me, dear one : be my unblenched honour the indemnity for my future actions.”

“ Your honour”—and Matilda spoke with energy and feeling—“ the saints be my witness, your honour stands as unimpeached as heavenward truth ! Yet—yet”—and her voice faltered, and her every feature grew convulsed—“ such a step ! such a fearful recognisance ! Ah ! spare me ! I implore you, spare me ! Your honour, your image,” in all the genuine warmth of innocence, “ will live in my bosom, will bide with me unto death : in absence, in distance, whatever be my future destiny, you—you——”

“ Matilda, answer me”—and the palmer trembled with the like emotion—

“ answer



“ answer me, on your hopes of hereafter blessedness. If sanctioned by your father’s approval, would your heart war against the compact?”

Matilda raised her eyes to the face of her lover: softness, tenderness, lived in the glance; her cheek was suffused with blushes; her smile betokened assurance and trust.—“ My heart,” she pronounced —“ Virgin Mother! my heart would glory in the bond!”

“ Then be the bond accomplished!” exultingly returned the palmer. “ This day—this blessed day, Matilda, give me the right I supplicate. Nay, no more scruples,” checking her effort to speak. “ Your father, your own father, would absolve me even of precipitancy. Cradled in innocence and security, living away from the world and the world’s habits, you dream not the despotic rules of custom: but there are imperious laws, there are iron boundaries, which to o’erleap, is to incur obloquy. Three whole

whole days in a camp—with a stranger—a soldier.—The fame of woman, though pure as vestal saints——” He ceased, for Matilda turned death-sick, and buried her face in her hands. A new trial felt to assail her—a pang, unknown before. “As my bride,” resumed the palmer, pitying her agitation, and tenderly supporting her, “who shall dare arraign the confidence? Give me the right to defend your actions, your motives; give your honour to my keeping. Matilda, I ask it, as a claim, vested in me by Heaven; for sure, the overruling hand of Heaven fashioned our last meeting.”

The last meeting revived, and every scruple vanished: it was security from the future machinations of De Mauleon; it was the fruition of every earthly hope, in the plighted love of her preserver.

“For ever, and for ever!” murmured Matilda, and panting, and almost breathless, subdued by the whispers of persuasion,

sion, and betrayed by the pleadings of her own heart, she yielded implicitly to the guidance of her lover.

A few short hours, and how wild, how vast, the transition! Ere night's murky vapours had scudded before the advance of day, ere the dappled east had glowed into perfect beauty, mounted on her palfrey, Matilda again moved at the side of the palmer. But alas! she moved not, as heretofore, with gratitude and exultation in her heart: now, her heart was sick and drooping; for the prospect of adieu, hung, like a death-shroud on her feelings; and the din of battle, and the ensanguined field of slaughter, the parting struggle, the groan of anguish, the faint last moan of human strength, flitted, in such grim and ghastly fantasies, that hope herself was scared, and coming life looked dark as a moonless midnight!

Detached from the main body of his followers, and surrounded but by a chosen  
sen

sen few, the palmer's immediate destination was a monastery within three hours' journey from the camp: there, he purposed tarrying, to pledge faith at Heaven's altar; and there, he meant to yield up his youthful bride to the care and guardianship of holy church, until time and happier prospects warranted reunion. But though in his own breast he cherished the rainbow-tints of brightening fortune—though he strove to enliven and reassure the almost breathing statue at his side—though dismounting, he led her palfrey, and talked of richer promises and gayer scenes—the funereal gloom, embosoming the cells, and shrines, and cloisters of fanatic worship, struck cold and damp upon his spirit. He looked up; he saw the cheek of Matilda white as her bosom, her very lips fast fading to clay: and as he struck into the path, as he broke through the fern and bushes, as he neared the walls—

“Where awful arches made a noonday night,”

his

his own cheek grew as wan, his own lips became as bloodless. Alas ! in one brief instant, no more did—

“ ————— That spirit of his  
In inspiration hit him from the earth ”

he was chained down in gloom and thought ; he was called back to care and to inquietude ; he was shackled with as sad fancies, as ever harboured in the breast of weaker woman :—and when the iron-tongued bell knolled through the solitude—when the gate was unbarred, and hospitality smiled a greeting—he lifted his promised bride from the palfrey, and he held her to his bosom, with such a clasp of agony, that it seemed as though the oracle of ill omen tokened the doubt of his return.

Swift as the shifting scenes of the drama, did the hymeneal torch lighten to the high altar, did the officiating priest counsel of the duties of married life : the pledge was exchanged, the bond  
of

of mutual fellowship and love; the sacred, the mystic compact, uniting unto death: and though many a happier, still never a fairer bride graced the holy ritual. The palmer, wrapt in the bewilderment of passion, gazed upon the maiden-rose-blush deepening and fading on her cheek, upon the mingling joy and sadness living in her eye: yet was the indulgence brief: calls more urgent, duties more imperious, tore him from the blissful contemplation; the soldier triumphed o'er the lover; the stern command of honour wedded him to another calling.

“ I must away,” he murmured, wrestling with the pang within—“ I must leave you to watch and to pray, to while out the long, long days of absence. Yet, Matilda”—and he clasped her to his heart, and he impressed on her pale quivering lips the hallowed first kiss of holy faith—“ thou art my own! wedded, plighted, in the sight of Heaven! Matilda,

tilda, distance may interpose ; but man, nor fortune, can separate us now !”

Again, in the strength of assurance, he folded, he held her to his bosom, as though to part were death :—and then, with many an admonition, and many an enjoined care ; with promises of return, and half-breathed exclamations of regret, and hope, and fondness—tintless, and tear-fraught, as the lily gemmed in morn’s earliest dew, he yielded her to the care of the pious sisters ;—then rushing to the court-yard, and vaulting into his saddle, nor daring a second glance at the asylum of his bride, he clapped spurs to horse, and followed by his retinue, quick, as a shooting star, was lost in distance.

END OF VOL. I.







